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MISS DAISY DIMITY

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“QUEENIE,”

“ORANGE LILY,” “A JEWEL OF A GIRL,”

“MY LOVE, SHE’S BUT A LASSIE,”

&c., &c.

By the same author

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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“ With little here to do or see
Of things that in the great world be,
Sweet Daisy ! oft I talk to thee,
 For thou art worthy,
Thou unassuming common-place
Of Nature, with that homely face,
And yet with something of a grace,
 Which love makes for thee !

Oft on the dappled turf at ease
I sit and play with similes,
Loose types of things through all degrees,
 Thoughts of thy raising ;
And many a fond and idle name
I give to thee, for praise or blame,
As is the humour of the game,
 While I am gazing.”

To the Daisy—WORDSWORTH.

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MISS DAISY DIMITY.

CHAPTER I.

“Of all the floures in the mede,
Than love I most these floures white and rede,
Such that men callen daisies in our toun.”

SQUIRE DIMITY was standing on the lawn that separated his square, white family mansion from the high-road, watching his whole gang of labourers, five men and a boy, raking hay.

The sun was shining gloriously; the birds were singing as if each little brown body held a far bigger soul of music. One cuckoo had got perfectly hoarse from

his exertions in one of the high elm-trees that had given its name, two generations ago, to Elm Hall; when the squire's grandfather built the house—and the surrounding gentry sniffed thereat, and called it Calico Hall, and himself a “parvenoo.”

The old man did not care, bless them! He used to slap his pocket, and say it was a jolly good thing to *be* a parvenoo! Better than to have got to the top of the tree, and then be going down the hill. His metaphors, you see, had been apt to get somewhat jumbled together.

Now the present good squire stood, ankle-deep in hay, under a big elm; with his chest expanded, his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, and his broad red face reddening more and ever more while blinking at the sun. And thus he meant to stand a good half hour longer in animal enjoyment, when—

“Papa, papa,” cried his eldest daughter Daisy, coming tripping towards him over the grass, “Mrs. Dimity says—will you come in *immediately*, please.”

Daisy was as fresh and sweet as her god-mother flowers. She was a little creature, rather like a dove, with large blue eyes that generally looked immensely astonished. She was plump as to figure, but with a small, trim waist that it was quite a pleasure to span, especially as it did not feel tightened. In spite of this latter advantage, Daisy’s young brothers called her “Chubby” (thus are charms vulgarly described in the home circle). Her father spoke of her as his “Sweet Dumpling;” if that was any better expression is a matter of opinion.

Just now Daisy Dimity’s eyes looked even bigger and more dewy bright than usual; her cheeks, that were generally twin

roses, were more like field-poppies from excitement; and the squire noticed, with slow surprise, that she was hardly able to speak, she was so breathless.

“There is a letter just come from Jack; a very important one! Would you please mind at once—I mean, would you mind, please, coming in—at once?”

“A letter from Jack,” echoed the squire, but in a manner far from being as precipitate as her own.

Jack was the soldier son; the eldest; lately returned with his regiment, after having had his first trial of army life, for a few years, on foreign service.

The Dimitys had never been martial before, so far as anybody knew. In the squire’s grandfather’s time they had emerged from the peaceable occupations of honest huckstering into the still gentler life of small country gentlefolk. The

squire had felt horror at first of his son's choice of a profession, for of course all soldiers were wild, were scapegraces, &c. And Mr. Dimity's own mother, whom he took after, had always declared that "officers were the mischief!" so the worthy gentleman quoted.

But Jack, who likewise took after *his* mother (a lady who during her short life had shown much more determination than her husband), would have his own way. So now, with a groan, Mr. Dimity asked of his soul, "Can it be DEBTS?"

Daisy, with that quickness of sympathy for which her sex is so justly famed, perceived that her father was alarmed, because he cried "Phew——!" with prolonged dolefulness, pursed up his genial lips into what he mistakenly imagined to be the similitude of a closed oyster-shell, and wagged his head in a portentous manner.

“It isn’t anything wrong,” she cried out, with her heart going pit-a-pat against her ribs. “It isn’t really” (then the murder came out!). “Only Jack’s regiment is giving a ball, *and he wants me to go to it!*”

“You, child—why, you never were at a ball before.”

“Why, papa, that’s just the reason——”

“But, bless my heart, surely you’re not old enough.”

“Oh! papa—I’m eighteen past, ever so long.”

“Bless my heart!” said the squire again, as they were moving towards the house. “I never know what ages you all are. Why, it was only the other day they told me you were sixteen! Well, well, we’ll see what your stepmother says about it.”

No, the squire never did know the ages of any of his family. He used to drive the present Mrs. Dimity wild, she declared,

by thinking his own daughters so much younger, and herself years older than they all really were. She was the gentlest woman imaginable; but a worm *will* turn when its feelings are hurt, and this was one of the vulnerable points of this especial human worm. So the squire, with a puzzled expression and ponderous steps, sighing secretly in heart over his hay, obeyed the feminine appeal to his superior wisdom, and went indoors. His was an honest, square house, and in it there were no gables or nooks, or unexpected steps to break one's neck stumbling down. The drawing-room was a square apartment on the right side of the entrance-door of Elm Hall; the dining-room was one exactly corresponding on the left side. As to the drawing-room itself it hardly deserves description in these days; for there was no "high art" about it, no dado, no chip-

pendale chairs and brasses, no blue china or peacock trimmings, not a stick of furniture half as old as Queen Anne's days.

It was only suggestive of sunlight, flowers, and chintz coverings over goodness knew what of finery, uncovered three times a year for the dinner parties which the squire respectively termed "hi-tum, ti-tum, and scrub." Indeed, it is doubtful whether vulgar "scrub" was ever thought worthy by Mrs. Dimity of beholding those hidden glories.

The squire stood now before the fireplace, which was filled with growing ferns and ivy this summer weather, and mechanically tucked up his coat-tails. He eyed his wife, then Daisy, and his next daughter, young Polly, of sixteen, who, ranged together, were all eyeing him ; and he felt inclined to say, "*At it——!*"

But, instead, he only observed to Mrs. Dimity,

“ Well, my dear ? ”

“ Here is Jack’s letter, my dear. Daisy, dear—my dear Daisy, read it out,” said Mrs. Dimity, nervously ; for she was a gentle, thin crane of a woman, tyrannised over by her many boisterous boys, and without much stamina.

Daisy, hereupon, read out a warm effusion from her brother, begging his “ dear old girl ” to be sure and get leave, and come down to Marstown for the ball their regiment was giving next week.

It would be so jolly to have her ! and Mrs. Cox had offered to put her up for ten days : which was really awfully kind. Indeed, Cox and the whole family were most good-natured to him, and he liked them, for his part, very much.

Mrs. Cox had promised to explain all

details, and so, as he hated letter-writing, he remained her affectionate brother,

F. G. DIMITY.

P.S.—He would be very glad to see the mum and governor at the ball, too, only he didn't suppose they'd come.

A grunt from the squire indicated that the last sentence was about the most sensible one of the letter, in his opinion.

“Mrs. Cox! And who, on this earth, *is* Mrs. Cox?” he now bluntly inquired. “Where did Jack pick her up? Is she respectable? And what put it into her head to ask the child?”

“She is my second cousin, once removed, Squire, as I think you might have remembered from seeing her sister's husband, who had married again *very* well, and is a banker, at our wedding,” remarked Mrs. Dimity, with tremulous

dignity, now opening out a second letter, and smoothing her dress.

“Of course,” the good lady went on, “I don’t expect my relations to be thought much of in this house; though she is a very good doctor’s wife in Marstown, as I have always heard, not that I ever met her, and he used to be in the Army—I mean he is a very good doctor, I am sure. At least, he *ought* to be, from his wife’s connections. Though, of course, if it had been a relation of your own, or of the first Mrs. Dimity’s——”

She stopped, quite hurt, and in a mildly tearful, warm state; for this was a second point on which Mrs. Dimity “had her feelings.”

“I am sure, dear, she must be a very nice person; most kind! Fancy asking me for your sake, you know, because you are her cousin!” cried Daisy, in eager

sympathy, giving her step-mother a most consoling glance out of her limpid, big eyes, while young Polly eyed her father with silent reproof.

Of course Mrs. Cox must be the warmest-hearted lady alive; a living piece of philanthropy; a creature all made of the milk of human kindness. Had she not asked Daisy to stay for her first ball?

In a mournful voice, Mrs. Dimity now began reading out her distant relation's letter. It was, indeed, a very well-expressed and warm invitation. The writer, supposing Mrs. Dimity's surprise on receiving her letter from Marstown, whither Dr. Cox had removed some years ago, declared her own delight on meeting lately Mr. Jack Dimity, her cousin's step-son. Here followed some quite elegant phrases, worthy of the polite letter-writer, *à propos* of consanguinity. Mrs. Cox had never

seen Mrs. Dimity, but her feelings were none the less warm, etc. For their relationship's sake, she had warmly hailed Mr. Jack's acquaintance, and would as affectionately welcome his sister, whom the young man was so eager to see at the ball to be given by his regiment.

If entrusted to her, Mrs. Cox promised to take even *more care* of Daisy than of her own daughters. Hereupon followed loving touches as to her own family, and lucid details as to the girl's journey. A sensible letter altogether.

Having ended its perusal, Mrs. Dimity folded up her letter with a sigh, put it carefully in its envelope, and regarded her husband.

"Well, well, well, my dear, you know best about your cousin, I daresay," said the squire, moving uneasily, being in more mortal terror of Mrs. Dimity's "feelings"

than of a sound scolding, and longingly looking outside. "Only, if you have all made up your minds already about this ball, why in the name of goodness did you call me away from the hay to consult me, as you all said?" (He rather scored there.) "Let the little one go, with all my heart, and I hope she'll enjoy herself; and Polly too, if she likes. The girls are for you to look after, not me."

"Not at all; they are *your* daughters, Squire," replied Mrs. Dimity, stopping a futile attempt on the good man's part to gain the door; and confronting him with the suddenly decided air of a well-principled worm of a step-mother.

It should never be laid to her door that she had sent Daisy to stay with her (Mrs. Dimity's) second cousin, on whose social position the squire had seemed to cast aspersions, as she observed.

Naturally, blood being thicker than water, she thought—she hoped—her second cousin was *respectable* (with meekest satire).

But if the squire's daughter was to go now, after what he had said—(poor Dimity, still hankering after the hay, scratched his head and wondered what he *had* said)—it must be HIS OWN DOING !

“Perhaps it would be better, Daisy, my dear, if you were to go away and let your papa and me talk this affair over together,” added Mrs. Dimity, with the sigh of a misunderstood woman, whose anxieties to do her duty by her husband and his first family and all the world were not quite appreciated. “Of course, as to the idea of Polly going, I never heard of such a thing ! And she not out ! My dear Polly, you have more sense than to think of it ; but men *never* think——”

“Not out, isn’t she? Well, she’s as big as Daisy, anyhow,” cried the squire, in a would-be jolly voice, ruefully watching his two daughters slip out of the room.

Both had most unusually tightened up their mouths into rosy buttons with a demure air that said as plainly as could be, “For once we are on our step-mamma’s side; and if Daisy is not allowed to stay with that most warm-hearted woman and well-connected person, Mrs. Cox, for Jack’s ball, we shall *cry*.”

“Perhaps, also, my dears, you would give the children their lessons—as usual—meantime. I hear them making a little noise,” added Mrs. Dimity, with a meek tone; as if, her family having been impugned, everything in this world now began with “perhaps” for her; and perhaps, henceforth, even Squire Dimity’s pantry boy might not have the kind-

ness to black poor Mrs. Dimity's boots.

"My love, what is the use of this consultation? I am perfectly—perfectly—perfectly satisfied with all you decide on about the girls," exclaimed the squire, when they were left alone, preparing to bolt.

"Oh! no, John, you might reproach me hereafter," and out came a damp handkerchief.

"But, my darling! my darling!" expostulated Mr. Dimity, who always grew extremely affectionate in language during such domestic scenes. Then, as Mrs. Dimity turned to draw her own easy-chair nearer very solemnly, he threw up the window-sash with a cheerful grin, and, the lawn and the hay being just outside, prepared in his own mind "to cut and run," as he mentally expressed it.

"*You'll stay, John—*" said his wife, with feeble spirit.

And so the poor squire was accordingly obliged to do, for the next quarter of an hour by the clock.

CHAPTER II.

“There were his young barbarians all at play.”

THE two sisters had no sooner left the drawing-room than, on their slow, very slow, progress upstairs to the school-room, they twined their arms round each other's waists in sign of mutual sympathy. Young Polly looked very hard in her sister's face, to express consolation and hope. Daisy drooped her head and gazed over the balusters, as who should say, “If I am *not* to go—it will be my duty to try and bear it; but one may always weep.”

Meanwhile, such a fearful racket was going on overhead in the school-room,

where these two young daily governesses were being missed by their juvenile brethren, that the sisters dared not linger longer on the stairs over their little embraces and mutual agonies of doubt and fear.

Mrs. Dimity said she had heard "a little noise," like the gentle mother of many she was. Why, the din was ear-splitting!—

On opening the door, all the Tribe of Gad, as the squire called his second family, was discovered at tribal play. Billy, the eldest, was standing in his hob-nailed boots on the top of the cottage piano, flinging cane chairs across the room to Bobby, who received them mounted aloft devastatingly among lesson-books and desks on the school-room table.

Billy's aim was edifyingly accurate; but his younger brother's missiles generally fell short, when each crash was signalized

by a war-whoop and savage dance of joy.

Jemmy, the third, was “niggering” himself, by adorning his rosy cheeks with black, brought with pains from the highest attainable recesses of the chimney. But this was remediable.

On the other side there was meek Master Charlie, Mrs. Dimity’s delicate darling, supposed by his mamma to be incapable of mischief, who was now silently amusing himself by snipping short the eyelashes of his baby brother, whom to that end he had propped up in a corner, and fenced in with a sofa cushion, to prevent the recalcitrant infant from crawling away ; and, whenever the baby remonstrated with a howl, Charlie either gently pummelled him, or read him a lecture on the sin of rebellion to his elders. Mrs. Dimity destined Charlie to be a clergyman.

The two sisters, being accustomed to such sights, did not wait long to express horror, but very quickly restored some order.

Daisy gently reasoned, young Polly scolded soundly, according to their respective natures.

Then the desks and lesson-books were put to use again ; but the two little governesses had not their hearts in the tasks much more than the pupils, their ears being strained to catch the opening of the drawing-room door, and heads being often quickly raised in sudden expectation.

“Now, Jemmy dear, spell gig,” said Daisy, encouragingly, but with a secret sigh.

“Gig !” slowly soliloquised Jemmy ; and then, struck with a phonetic inspiration, he uttered confidently, like a young Scotchman, what sounded like, “Gie-i-gie.”

“Now, Jemmy, there is no letter in the whole alphabet that sounds like your *gie*.”

“Then there ought to be.”

“Jemmy! That is really naughty. Now listen. G-i-g spells gig. Say it after me.”

“G-i-g, *jig*,” observed Jemmy, gazing out of the window with a heart longing after green fields.

Fresh remonstrances from Daisy; ever increasing obstinacy on the part of Jemmy.

A lively argument began, in which the unfortunate syllable was shuttlecocked to and fro between them, Jemmy stoutly holding to it that his system was the most reasonable, when hark!

That was the drawing-room door at last, and Mrs. Dimity's step ascending in its limp, listless way, as usual.

Daisy's heart beat a tattoo. Polly stood

still, in the act of administering a cuff to Bobby.

The door opened, and their step-mother's meek long face looked in with the smile of one whose modest claims as to the respectability of her family had been recognised.

"I have laid the whole matter before your father, my dears, and he says——" ("Oh! why *can't* she be quick?" mentally ejaculated the sisters)—"he says . . . that he sees, after all, no positive objection to your going to stay with my second cousin."

Great joy!

Daisy instantly flew to give her step-mother a kiss, who presented a long-suffering cheek for that purpose. Polly clapped her hands. The tribe, not knowing the cause of rejoicing, but ready to join in any excitement, made sundry ecstatic noises, whilst Jemmy relieved his

feelings by shrieking "G-i-g, jig!" several times unreprieved.

Then they all clamoured for a holiday.

"Oh, yes, let them off for to-day," pleaded Polly. "There is so much to think of, you know, for Daisy has only three days to prepare."

"Yes, and *what shall I wear?*" dismally added Daisy, one difficulty no sooner surmounted than a fresh one, like a still higher hill, appeared rising before her.

Mrs. Dimity agreed to the dismissal of the scholars, resignedly—indeed, in her own way she was one of the kindest-intentioned of women, though cheerfulness was an effort to her.

So, left in peace, with the school-room emptied of all its turbulent inhabitants, the three ladies sat down to hold a severe feminine committee on what articles of dress Miss Dimity must take to Marstown

—above all, to discuss the make of that ethereal robe in which she must float before the admiring eyes of Jack and his brother officers on the great occasion of their regimental ball.

(What shall we wear? Is not that the first tremendous question to nine-tenths of British girls on hearing of any gaiety to come? The remaining tenth may be too rich, or too blue, or too hoydenish, or too slovenly to share the feeling.)

Luckily—most luckily—Madame Furbelow, of the adjacent town, had come back from Paris (so she declared) a month ago, bringing one exquisite, white, model ball-gown, which had been admired by all that lady's customers; surreptitiously copied; but not bought—oh, dear, no! for balls were rare, indeed, in that bucolic land, and money, though plentiful enough, was more soundly invested; so Madame Furbelow's

gown bade fair to remain on her hands.

“But, now, your father says I may drive in and buy it for you,” said Mrs. Dimity, losing all her melancholy at the interesting prospect of shopping. “I told him it was dreadfully dear, but a bargain—lined with Bonnet’s white silk, you know—and he said he might as well ‘go the whole hog’ when he was about it. Very rude of him.”

“Very good of him.”

The sentences jostled against each other; but, as they all understood each other, no one stopped to give explanations.

Everybody knew the model gown in these parts, and what it cost; but it would strike the beholders in Marstown as something quite new, all three agreed.

“Well, if you two drive over this afternoon, I’ll walk to tell the laundress,” said Polly, magnanimously. The squire’s hired household being modest enough in num-

ber, the family employed a cottager's wife to wash, who lived a mile away, down long dusty lanes. "I'd better tell her to put ever so much more starch in your cotton gowns," remarked Polly, with a thoughtful demeanour. "It gives one an air of far greater consequence."

"You have not got a really handsome lace handkerchief for the ball?" considerably observed Mrs. Dimity, adding, with a supreme effort of good-nature, "Well, I will lend you my wedding one. It was a present from my Aunt Jones, and cost three pounds fifteen shillings, so you'll have to be *very* careful of it."

Was there ever such a pearl of price of a step-mother? Daisy interrupted her with voluble thanks and assurances of so guarding the existence of that handkerchief that, if she kept her promise strictly, it was extremely unlikely that she would

enjoy herself at all on the night of the ball in question.

“And I’ll lend you my new hat,” quoth Polly, not to be outdone in generosity.

But Daisy demurred before accepting such a sacrifice. Had not Polly lumped the little last all of her quarterly allowance on that hat, which was “the sweetest thing” at Madame Furbelow’s. Had not the elder Miss Dimity, sighing in admiration, acknowledged she could not afford such another, her accounts being too delicately balanced; and *debt* representing itself to the sisters as an abyss of awfulness even blacker (because unknown) than to the good squire’s mind.

But Polly insisted and gained the day. Was there ever such a sister, far above rubies !——?

“Some other time you can maybe do as much again for me,” said the younger,

with an awkward laugh, not wanting to pose as a benefactress.

“Yes, indeed. Some day or other, if your sister is married, she may lend *you* something smart, when you come out, Polly,” responded Mrs. Dimity, so animated that she felt inclined to joke in some mild way; although at that the two young sisters shyly drew back, being fastidiously sensitive on such subjects.

The good lady was not fastidious, but still too much of a gentlewoman to utter the thought in her mind—that had indeed reigned supreme there ever since Jack’s all-important letter came—which was that maybe Daisy might meet her future husband at Marstown! As a step-mother, Mrs. Dimity indeed feebly hoped it might be so. Of course nobody—no girl, she owned, could be more useful to her little step-brothers than Daisy.

That was very true.

On the other hand, was it not aggravating for a person of Mrs. Dimity's undecided appearance as to age to have such a grown-up step-daughter.

Strangers had absolutely been rude enough to suppose her to be Mrs. Dimity's own daughter. So ridiculous!

"Daisy! Daisy!" the squire was now heard shouting. "Are you not going to exercise old Slug. If you don't, I must—and I don't like to leave that hay. If John has to drive your step-mother over to buy your fal-lals this afternoon, it'll be as much as he can do with the horses."

"Yes, yes, I'm coming, papa. (*Are bouillonnés or box pleats most worn, I wonder*)."

"Let *me* go? But oh, there are two hens to be set with Brahma eggs this morning, and a brood of young Cochins coming

out," offered Polly, hesitatingly; her heart being just now in the hen-wife's profession.

"Never mind; I'll ride Slug, dear. Indeed I like it," gaily answered Daisy, fairly dancing out of the room.

Slug was the squire's old brown hunter; most cunning and lazy of equine animals when allowed his own way. But Daisy felt she would make him go her way to-day, and so get rid of some of the excitement that made her heart feel like a volcano of delight, without any escape-valve in the way of a crater.

Up and down, between the green hedges that skirted Elm Hall, she softly exercised Slug; and, while the birds sang in the boughs that brushed her cheek at moments or interlaced overhead, they all seemed to her chanting the same refrain in different ways, of which the burden was something like—

“Delight!—delight!—delight!—delight . . ful . . !”
in a prolonged twitter. They too, like Daisy, loved the thought of music and movement. They, too, loved change, the essence of life; but they had it. For they could wander from wood to wood; fly to sunny lands, when it was winter here. But Daisy had never left home before further than to stay in the adjacent shire once or twice with some old maiden aunts; so no wonder the young girl was inexpressibly happy.

Visions of balls, of delightful partners, also rose in her little brain, as impalpable but delicious as the scent of the hawthorn in the hedges beside her; romantic possibilities—— This was only pure nature!

If, as Tennyson sings—

“In the spring a livelier iris changes on the burnish’d
dove;

In the spring a young man’s fancy lightly turns to
thoughts of love.”

And why not much more the thoughts of a young maiden?

But still, even in this blissful dreaming, a remembrance of other days, of those visits in past childhood (two or three years ago!) to the old spinster aunts, rose in the little damsel's memory; and with a half self-reproachful, half self-ridiculing sigh—such as that she had breathed on putting past for good and all her long-loved doll in a lavender-scented drawer consecrated to similar cherished treasures that her infantile fancy had invested once with a real existence—with such a fond sigh she said now softly to herself, “Jerry Brown.”

Now, who was Jerry Brown? . . .

Certainly none of Miss Dimity's family or friends could have told, excepting young Polly, who knew a little on the subject.

That Polly knew very little, however, is inferred from the fact that she knew much

less than her elder sister, who was sometimes secretly inclined to doubt whether she knew anything at all about him; excepting that she believed he had still a living existence on this earth, unlike the last doll, to whose primeval period his memory also belonged.

CHAPTER III.

“And as a lyoun he his lokying caste,
Of fyve and twenty yeer his age I caste.
His berd was wel bygonne for to sprynge;
His voys was as a trumpe thunderynge.”

THE day of Miss Dimity's departure from her home had dawned at last.

There was the usual hurried breakfast known to all similar young travellers; the last cording of packages and labelling; a terrified outcry from Polly that something—the indispensable sash of some gown—was nearly forgotten.

Then the announcement from the squire that the fat old horses were impatient (what a rarity!) and must not be kept

waiting. On which ensued hurried kisses from all the female members of the household, with outcries of, “ You’ll be sure and write, dear.”

And Daisy, packed into the family coach, waving her hand, is off !

One may skip lightly over the incidents of the journey ; how the fat guard was enormously feed by papa to look after her ; how he locks her up accordingly in a first-class carriage alone with *Punch*, her tremors and anticipations, and an occasional stiff old lady. This, and the permission to get out at certain halting-places for refreshment (of which she was too nervous of being left behind to avail herself), constituted his severe duties till they reached the junction. Here, with a nudge, suggestive of more fees, he solemnly transferred her to the next fat guard.

How weary by afternoon little Miss

Dimity grew of staring at the flying country, and of *Punch*, which she has read listlessly a hundred times; how dusty and more and more stiff hour by hour, till at last—could it be possible!—as she was nearing one station within three of the goal, she actually laid down her head, and before she realised the insinuating fact, was a prey to sleep.

How then, in a wild hurry, hearing “Marst’n” shouted, the little traveller woke up, and finding the train stopped at a tiny ticket-taking platform, quite forgot in which of the most safe recesses of her hand-bag her ticket was hidden. “Goodness, it’s *lost*!” she ejaculated, in dismay, horror-stricken, as by the sound of his voice a stern porter was momentarily approaching. Then—how could she have put it there?—at the instant of utterly final despair it peered out of her purse, at

which she *did* give a sigh of inexpressible relief.

What awful consequences would have ensued had it been really undiscoverable, were more than Daisy knew.

But before she had time to recover from the fright of the situation, or to rub her eyes wide awake, or to gather up her many wraps, the train had glided into the bustle and lights of the terminus. Some one flung the door wide, and Jack's gruff, beloved voice exclaimed—

“Well, little one, and how are *you*?”

Jack's manners not being at all gushing, this and a grasp which nearly wrings her fingers off, are the only tokens of brotherly affection he thinks it proper to bestow upon Daisy in public.

“Now you must introduce your sister to me, Mr. Dimity,” says a motherly voice behind, and Daisy finds her hand most

softly clasped by a tall lady, evidently once handsome.

As Jack complied by briefly uttering, "Daisy, this is Mrs. Cox. Mrs. Cox—here she is," the tall lady smiled upon them both benignly, and retained her hold of Daisy's hand, whilst Jack, who dearly liked a little command, promptly began seeing to his sister's luggage.

"You are most welcome! my dear, most welcome! both for your stepmother's sake and your brother's, whom we have got to know and like so very much—so very much—yes, indeed, so *very much*," said Mrs. Cox, gently repeating her pressure of Daisy's hand at each reiteration of the regard of her family for Jack.

What a comfortably warm, yet not too-overpowering manner of reception Mrs. Cox had. Daisy, who till then had been quite frightened at the idea of being

among strangers for the first time, now felt almost inclined to nestle up beside her hostess.

Then Jack returned : and they all three got into a fly, which presently drove up to a house that showed more lights than its neighbours, in a rather dark, wide road, bordered with villas, mostly owning a yard or two of shrubbery.

It was one of those little houses, built now-a-days wherever stone is cheap, with so much adornment of mullioned window, and variety in copingstones, and the way in which the steps zigzag to the door—that one nearly forgets their comparative insignificance of size. All the villas showed much diversity of taste. But this one, though only standing on very little land besides its own foundations, was proud of a glass shanty, stuck to its side ; which was called “ the conservatory.”

“Welcome, my dear, to Magdala Villa,” said Mrs. Cox.

Jack now jumped out of the carriage, and, having rung the bell, promptly declared he must say good-bye to them both, having to hurry back to barracks to entertain a friend at dinner.

“Won’t you come in and see the girls a moment. They will be quite disappointed,” remonstrated Mrs. Cox, insinuatingly.

Three female heads, or rather shadows of heads, could be distinctly descried peeping under the blind.

But Jack intimated that time did not allow of his having that pleasure, with a hardheartedness at which Daisy was somewhat hurt and disappointed. For she did want badly to see him a minute or two alone ; to get away from the Cox family, it might be, a moment, to give him a good hug ; and to tell all the news of Elm Hall,

of Polly, the squire, and the rest of the family.

But it might *not* be, plainly, this evening.

Mrs. Cox softly uttered many expressions of hospitable regret that Mr. Dimity could not stay and take pot-luck with them ; and Jack hurriedly thanked her as often for her awful goodness.

Daisy strained her eyes after her brother's beloved young form going quickly away in the darkness ; and the evening's pleasure was all damped to her thenceforth. She only vaguely seemed to know that she came into a bright-lit little entry ; next that three girls crowded round her with welcome, and sympathy for her supposed fatigues.

Then she was taken upstairs to a tiny bed-room, and begged not to change her dress, but to come down as she was ; as

soon as she had somewhat tidied herself, for tea.

“For we thought that would most refresh you after your journey, so mamma ordered it,” said that Miss Cox whom the guest supposed to be the eldest, because she was tallest, and had the sharpest little nose, upturned just at the tip, and seemed to take possession of the tired traveller more entirely.

“Do *you* always have late dinner at Elm Hall? Generally! Oh, dear, how unfortunate! Then you won’t like tea. And I am afraid, now it is too late to get you dinner.”

Shocked at herself for thus appearing troublesome and fine, Daisy hastened to assure her hostesses that she constantly went to school-room tea instead of dinner. In her anxiety, she almost declared she adored school-room tea; a horrible fib, the

fact being that she only took it to relieve poor Polly from presiding always over the orgies of the sons of Gad.

On going downstairs again, Daisy was immediately ushered in to the said repast of tea, poached eggs, and marmalade, bacon and Sally Lunn, salad and honey (thus her weary mind mixed them up together in a queer jumble). After a little she became able to remark more clearly all around her ; till then her head had felt quite swimming and stupid.

At the tea-tray Mrs. Cox presided with elegance, filling the cups in due order ; the strongest and best to the guest ; then to the doctor and to the girls ; last to herself.

The doctor sat smiling at the foot of the table, a fat little man with a red face, a very bald head, a large mouth, and a big bunch of seals on his watch-chain. He made a capital foil to his wife ; was always

rubbing his hands and smiling on Daisy; till the breadth of his smile and his whole appearance made her think of a beneficent frog.

The three young ladies were very much alike, and rather pretty in the stranger's tired sight. They had all three very yellow hair, rosy and white skins, little pug noses, and a merry manner; as yet their distinguishing characteristics were not very apparent.

"Miss Dimity, have you made out the difference between my girls yet?" cried the little doctor, gaily. "This is Fuzzy, my eldest, whose real name is supposed to be——"

"Hold your tongue, papa. It is such an ugly name. Nobody here knows it, and I'm not going to give the other Marstown girls such a pull over me," ejaculated the young lady.

Subsequently Daisy discovered that Miss Cox had been baptised Martha.

“Well, well—and this is Pussy, my second hope and joy,” chuckled the little doctor, continuing his description. “Her real name is—bless me, if I don’t forget!”

“Letitia, papa,” said the second Miss Cox, with even more softness and silkiness of manner than her mother.

“Yes, and this is our youngest, the baby of the family, at least, of the girls, who are my favourites—eh, Birdie—the spoiled child, are you not? Speak up for yourself,” chirped the doctor, pointing with his tea-spoon at the last of his daughters.

“Oh, papa, get out!” ejaculated the young lady, in a sprightly tone of answering raillery; and Daisy remarked, with slight surprise, that this was the one she had supposed to be eldest, because of her

tyrannical, small nose and her peculiar appropriation of the guest.

Mrs. Cox now began describing to her husband and daughters the manner of Jack's introduction of his sister to her: but did it in such a gentle, laughing way, as if she liked the young man's gruffly honest manner, that the little sister, with all her feathers ever ready to be ruffled in Jack's defence, felt quite pleased.

"I admire so much that decided tone in which your brother speaks; it is such true martial (what's the word, papa?)—brevity, isn't it?" said Miss Pussy to the guest, in a languishing manner.

Daisy opened her big eyes rather wider than usual.

"Oh! no," she said, in an explanatory tone. "Jack always had that way of speaking when he was quite a little boy. It's in the family. Old grandpapa had the

same, and he was a"—(checking herself abruptly, as her grandfather's peaceful occupation in selling drapery rose to her lips)—"and he was not a soldier."

"You made a bad shot that time, Pussy," sarcastically observed the eldest Miss Cox.

And the youngest one, now trying what she could make of the subject in her turn, said, in an innocent way,

"But what a thorough soldier your brother is in looks, Miss Dimity! Such a good figure, and his shoulders so broad! Of course you think him very handsome, don't you? Sisters always do. And I declare I admire him very much myself!" And she laughed a pretty childish giggle.

"Birdie," said Mrs. Cox, "you are a silly baby."

And Daisy, who was very unused to receiving compliments upon any of her

family, and who looked upon all the members thereof as being part and parcel of herself, felt immensely flattered; but blushed and looked down on her plate.

Well, really she and Polly *did* think dear Jack good-looking, but they had never thought the rest of the world would do so, she murmured. In truth Jack was of a dumpy, sturdy little make, with small eyes, sleek dark hair, and not a hair on his face, that, though so young in appearance, and kindly-featured enough, yet seemed made of cast iron, so determined was his lower jaw.

“Ah! you see, Miss Dimity, you didn’t know your goose was considered a swan by outsiders, did you?” slyly said the little doctor.

“Well, for my part, I don’t know that he is a beauty, but he looks as hard as nails, and that’s what *I* like,” struck in the

eldest Miss Cox, striking the table at the same time with a spare spoon in an off-hand way, as a signal to her mother to rise and have done with the meal.

When poor Daisy rose, however, she felt so giddy she had to hold by her chair a moment. On being questioned by the little doctor, the amazing fact was elicited that, though she had been given a basket of good things (packed by the very own hands of their darling old cook) for her consumption on the journey, and though the guard had offered to free her from captivity frequently to get refreshment, yet, between excitement and nervousness, Miss Dimity positively had eaten nothing all day.

She was promptly swooped on, and carried off to bed. Miss Cox declared that this was a case for herself; being very fond of exercising her love of command on any patient. She ordered off her father, telling

him his great mind need not exercise itself on such little matters (adding, *sotto voce*, that "men ought not to meddle in such things"); she ordered off her mother, saying, "You know you are not a doctor; but *I* take after papa."

She would have even ordered off her sisters. But Pussy declared she felt that what poor little Miss Dimity most needed was sympathy, and would by no means be turned out of the latter's bed-room. And Birdie, popping in after them, declared if the others were there so would she come in too.

"For you know, Mr. Dimity is most my friend; so you ought to be most my friend too. You needn't look, Pussy—he is! And we are nearest of an age, dear, too. I may call you dear, may I not? Oh! you poor dear, I must give you a kiss to say good night, mayn't I?"

Whereupon Daisy, who was standing among them like a little wren with wet feathers, so miserable and sleepy she felt, was seized upon by Miss Birdie, and kissed, or rather pecked at, not once, but half a dozen times.

“Now it’s my turn,” put in Miss Pussy, jealously ; and, not to be outdone, she likewise embraced the captive, nearly smothering her with osculatory tenderness.

“I declare it is too bad not to let you go to bed ; you look so tired, just like a little owl with big eyes, only ever so much prettier than any owl. But you, darling,” —(by that daring word she nearly utterly extinguished Birdie’s claims to warmest friendship)—“you look so sweet and nice, I must just kiss you *again*.”

The guest, with a heartfelt sigh, wished she would not. But again Pussy and Birdie began, as energetically as ever.

“It is a shame,” said Miss Cox, rather grimly, holding out her hand and giving Daisy’s soft fingers a grasp that wrung them in very favourable comparison, as to strength, with Jack’s grip of affection. “So that’s all I’ll bother you with. Come off, girls; don’t be worrying her any more, like two cats at a mouse. Good night.”

Left alone in delicious privacy, Daisy slowly recovered. As she brushed out her hair, she wondered to herself whether the gushing scene she had just been put through, was attributable to the Misses Cox having been at school. (The squire never would allow herself and Polly to go to school, declaring he liked home-bred girls best, so had governesses for them.)

Jack, she remembered, used often to make a joke of school-girls, their violent friendships and petty quarrels, he said, and propensity for falling in love. Jack

knew, because there had been a young ladies' seminary close to his school ; and many a surreptitious note from vainly enamoured damsels had that hard-hearted young man been supposed to receive ; though, being reticent by nature, neither Polly nor Daisy, with all their coaxing and caresses, could ever extract the contents of those *billets-doux* from him.

CHAPTER IV.

“Mistress Matrossa hopes to be a lady,
 Not as a dignity of late expected,
 But from the time almost she was a baby,
 That hath your richest gentlemen rejected ;
 But yet, not dubbed at present as she should be,
 Lives in expectance still—my Lady Would-be.”

BREAKFAST was somewhat late next morning, in Miss Dimity's opinion.

Not too late indeed for her, refreshed as she needed to be by a long night's rest, but later even than at Elm Hall, where lazy comfort was the order of the day. She came down with eager punctuality, for was not this the first day of her first visit in the great world?

Entering the room, Daisy fancied she saw Mrs. Cox herself dusting the china ornaments ; but that lady whisked her duster, or whatever it was, so quickly into a cupboard that her young guest was not sure, especially as the hostess had quite a languid demeanour, though she held out both her hands with warmth.

“ You are in excellent time, my dear ; and I hope, I *do* hope you are quite rested. Yes ? That is nice ; that is so nice. Shall you and I sit down to a cosy breakfast together, for my girls are terribly late ; and sometimes I have to take Birdie’s breakfast up to her bed, or she would get none.”

“ Oh ! mamma, how *can* you ? How naughty of you ! ” laughed Birdie from the door, with the cooing manner of a reproachful young dove.

“ Yes, don’t tell tales out of school,”

cried Fuzzy behind her ; and all the girls trooped in, as neat as you please.

Mrs. Cox smiled on her family, but suppressed a yawn herself with rather lackadaisical grace.

“Is it not rather early for you? Did you sleep long enough yourself, Mrs. Cox?” asked her guest, with quick sympathy.

“I, my dear—oh, I have been up several hours ago. I could not stay longer in bed of a morning. The doctor has to get his breakfast before anyone, and my two little boys have to be sent to school.”

“Oh, mamma is never tired. She is up by six every morning,” exclaimed all the girls in chorus, with a general surprise. “We could never do it; we take after papa; but mamma is wonderfully tough.”

If tough, Mrs. Cox looked tired.

The breakfast was not, by any means, so

abundantly-spread a meal as had been the late tea on the previous night. Indeed, most of the component parts of the latter were recognisable again. Still, though frugal, it was very carefully laid out. It contrasted quite favourably, in Daisy's easily-pleased opinion, with their own lavish one at home ; whereat Mrs. Dimity was never able to quell the gambols of her offspring, who, with youthful extravagance, generally ended by pouring ample libations of tea or jam on the table-cloth, apparently to their private tutelary deities, or by making a sacrifice of some of the china.

"Miss Dimity has not had an egg. I am sure she would like an egg," suddenly cried Birdie, watching their guest's plate. "Mamma, I must order her a boiled egg. Fuzzy, you're nearest the door ; run down to the kitchen."

"Oh, yes, my dear ; only isn't it rather

late?" replied Mrs. Cox, gently, with a faint flush.

Daisy began to say she did not really want one; but Fuzzy had vanished.

"There isn't another egg in the house," soon proclaimed Fuzzy, putting in her head again. "Mary Jane says so."

"Oh, nonsense, my dear; there must be *dozens*. How could Mary Jane say such a thing?" uttered poor Mrs. Cox, trying to hide annoyance, and looking meaningly at her daughter. "Go down, and tell her I said so."

Fuzzy went down again, grumbling. But before she returned, being apparently delayed, Daisy had cheerfully finished her breakfast, seeing nothing amiss, and only grieved that her expostulations against the egg had been utterly disregarded by Birdie.

Then they went upstairs to the drawing-

room, like a flight of young doves to their cote. How bright and brand-new all the furniture was (indeed the Coxes had only come to Magdala Villa since two or three months), but how stiff compared with Elm Hall! It was all an upholsterer's complete walnut-wood set, with a dozen high chairs standing stiffly about. There were two shining big tables that scorned embroidered covers, and there was a new piano (locked). But there was not a book lying about, save two big photo-books (likewise locked); not a flower, work-box, magazine, puzzle, knick-knack, or needle-worked piece of embroidery of any kind. Mrs. Cox said with pleasure she had got it new and tidy, and wished to keep it so; as she truly tried to do.

Alas! it was a wet morning. Flatten their faces as they might against the window-panes, plainly the leaden sky meant

to stream down a continuous pour of rain. Daisy owned with a sigh they must give up hopes of seeing the town that morning; as the girls had promised, and as herself had eagerly wished they should do. Martown was the first large town she had ever been in, and her imagination supposed it to be a little London, with a strong red-pepper sprinkling of military. (The last, no doubt, highly agreeable; but that might be as likely to take away the breath of a simple, little, country person like herself as cayenne always did.)

“Indeed, dear, it is not much of a town for shops or sights,” said Pussy, consolingly. “Let us sit in the drawing-room till lunch-time, and have a real *good* chat. We never go out till after lunch anyway, because we never meet any of them till afternoon.”

“Any of them?” repeated Daisy, inquiringly.

“Why, any of the *officers*, to be sure!” burst out all the young ladies.

“Oh!” replied Daisy, suddenly enlightened; and blushing she did not quite know why; except that the manners and customs of all the world but those of the denizens of Elm Hall were unknown to her, and she was always afraid of making some blunder.

“You mean the officers of the 160th.”

“Your brother’s regiment. Oh, no doubt you think the sun rises and sets only on them, like Birdie here; but that’s more than *I do!*” cried Fuzzy, affecting a fast and careless air, though with the colour deepening in her cheeks. “Now I’ll back the 170th to give them pounds any day and win in a canter.”

(Give them pounds!—the little guest

privately wondered what they should do that for, but carefully suppressed her ignorance.)

“Is there any other regiment here but Jack’s?” asked Daisy, which naïve question was received with a scream of laughter from the three Miss Coxes. She was really too deliciously countrified, they agreed.

Thereupon all three sisters settled down to have a good chat, as they called it, for the whole morning, to open the visitor’s mind. Daisy, in spite of her attempted remonstrance, was forced to recline upon half of the sofa; while Pussy, with one arm round her waist, occupied the remainder of it. Birdie seated herself on a stool, however; where, with her elbow in her new-found friend’s lap (and a sharp little one it was, too!), she gazed up lovingly, to the guest’s secret discomposure, in her face.

“What! want your work! Oh! no, dear Miss Dimity, indeed you don’t want it,” they cried, scouting a small, industrious proposition made by their young guest. “One can’t talk half so well if one is stitching.”

“Well, I mean to work,” quoth Fuzzy, decidedly, seating herself at a little table to embroider a pair of slippers—foxes’ heads, with glass eyes, on a scarlet ground. Her sisters gave a fresh little shriek of mirth. “Oh! but Fuzzy is finishing those slippers for her admirer, Major Hodge. He’s in the Queen’s Own Freebooters. The regiment is to leave the end of this week, and poor Fuzzy is very much gone on him, so we don’t envy her. What big feet he has, Fuzzy!” cried her sisters, gaily, or rather Birdie did so.

Pussy, though she joined in the laugh at the major’s feet, had sighed herself when

she spoke of the regiment's departure. Fuzzy tried to join in the mirth, but turned away her head, so that only Daisy saw accidentally that her face looked rather miserable, while she observed, staring out,

“Look, there is mamma going market-ing. What an old frump she is, in that waterproof and goloshes ! Why she won't send Mary Jane instead beats me hollow.”

Daisy, indeed, to her amazement, saw the elegant Mrs. Cox stealing out in a costume that much reminded her of their own washerwoman in wet weather.

But her attention was called off by the young ladies, who were volubly explaining that there were three regiments in Mars-town ; only one, the “fine 150th,” was “too fine ” for them. “Men who only go out ‘in the county,’ if you please,” mimicked Birdie, in a mincing voice. Then came the 160th, or “Strappers,” simply known

hitherto to Daisy as "Jack's regiment," which embodied all its claims to distinction in her mind. Lastly, there was the 170th, soon to depart, in which, besides the heart-broken Major Hodge, Pussy likewise had a well-beloved swain, a rather youthful lieutenant. "But she is wiser than Fuzzy, for she has begun to transfer her affections to some one in the 160th. She has her eye on Captain Gascoigne," went on the ingenuous Birdie.

"Now, Birdie, I have not settled yet on Captain Gascoigne. I know what you are driving at. You want to make me say I'll have him and give up somebody else, who likes me just as much, and I believe far better than he does you," angrily returned Pussy, getting red.

"He doesn't."

"He does."

"He doesn't."

“We’ll see, my dear——”

“Yes, my dear, so we shall,” sarcastically.

The quarrel was getting hot. But then both sisters, by common consent, looked at Daisy—and were silent. The latter felt uncomfortable at this, although the girls now smiled with apparent gaiety at each other—for Daisy herself and Polly were heartily and even unusually attached to each other—so she hazarded a remark,

“Captain Gascoigne!—he is Jack’s great friend, is he not? I remember, now, that Jack always said he was one of the best fellows in the world, or something like that, whenever he did speak of any of his brother officers; but he does not often.”

“He may be one of the best fellows *with men*,” put in Fuzzy, glancing up a moment from her work, at which she was toiling most industriously. “But he hates women, or is afraid of them, and never goes

out to walk without a brother officer on each side of him to keep ladies off! He is said to be very rich, though; and so certainly Pussy and Birdie are wise in their generation—though *I* tell them they may as well let it alone.”

“You, indeed!—much right you have to talk, Fuzzy! Why, I’d be ashamed to be your age and not have had a decent proposal yet,” jeered her youngest sister, with a contemptuous laugh, and went on, turning to Daisy—“She has been out five years, and has done no good yet, as I told papa and mamma when they wanted to keep me in half a year longer to give her another chance. And Pussy has been out two years, so now it’s high time I should try my hand at it.”

At it!—at what? Daisy silently wondered. And why should one sister be kept in to give the others chances?

Miss Birdie went on, however.

“Now, I only came out this last winter, and I’m making all the girls look alive, I can tell you. Such a set of old articles in the market as they are, as I told the Smeeths and Fuzzy the other day. Ha! ha! they were so angry, but I always say what I think—I’m such a spoiled little thing; and then I told them all they’d see I’d not be long on hand—I’ll be married before the year is out!”

There was a silence on the part of both her sisters.

Daisy, too, could not say a syllable, feeling pained, and fearing to hurt one or other. Then poor Fuzzy, who had evidently a good heart, made a sound as if she was swallowing a dry sob of vexation, and replied,

“Well, Baby dear, I’m sure I’ll be glad enough if you do better than I. Any

way, you can't say I was unkind about preventing your coming out."

"Oh, no, you are a good old thing enough; though you could not have stopped me, if you had even tried, for papa always takes my part. I'm his pet, and he won't allow mamma to sit on me," graciously replied Birdie, with a little domineering nod.

Then Pussy, to change the subject, rather hastily began, with her most fawning manner,

"Now I wonder who Miss Dimity will fall in love with here? . . . Are you often in love, dear Miss Dimity? All the girls here are just always in and out of it. Why, I *do declare* she's blushing!"

With many caresses of the guest, and some laughter, they all declared she was really quite too refreshing; but as Fuzzy first observed, and the others

agreed, it was a shame to torment her.

“Only I do—really—believe there is somebody. You darling, do just tell us what colour his hair is,” coaxed Birdie, with her most *ingenue* air.

“No, indeed—no, really, you are quite, quite wrong. We never see anybody at Elm Hall. There is nobody at all—there never was—except——”

“Ah, ah! except—except——” cried the pack.

“Except when I was quite a child, some years ago,” uttered poor Daisy, firmly, though her fresh peach-cheeks became again tinged with crimson. “It was only somebody—I suppose I was really very young, but I thought him quite a grown man then—who had a fancy for me, and used to pet me very much.”

They all looked at her rather curiously.

Birdie, who was short-sighted, put up

her eyeglass, as if such a curiosity was worth study. But none of them said anything. Was it because they were all very deferential to the guest, and anxious, for hidden reasons, to please her; or because of that respect for innocence everyone naturally shows to children?

Not to waste time, however, Pussy produced an Army List, and proceeded to give instruction (of which she was, indeed, very capable) in the "Officers' Bible," as she profanely termed it. (The book fell open, significantly, of its own accord at the pages describing the gallant 150th, 160th, and 170th regiments.)

The sisters, as they read out the names of Her Gracious Majesty's faithful and devoted officers in the latter three corps, accompanied them by such a running fire of description—that to Daisy's bewilderment colonels, captains, and subalterns were

soon jumbled together in her mind in undistinguishable confusion.

“ Captain O’Donoghue. Is that the poor man whose wife has such dreadful flirtations with all the very young officers, you say ?” she once timidly asked.

“ He married ? Catch him !—No—no. *He* is the wildest man in the British Army,” explained Birdie. “ What a muddle your poor mind is in, to be sure ! I’ll tell you what : she must take the ‘ Flirts’ Guide’ up to her bed-room, and study it every spare minute, or she’ll be making frightful mistakes.”

And the young lady went to get Daisy a little blue directory, which showed the names of all the officers then quartered in Marstown, with an asterisk affixed to the names of those married.

“ It is simply invaluable !” she enthusiastically exclaimed.

“ I really don’t want it—I’d rather not,” said Daisy, shyly withdrawing as Birdie officiously pressed it on her.

“ Oh, but you must. You can’t make us all blush, you know, by asking again about Mrs. O’Donoghue, when she isn’t in existence. And it would be so naughty to see you talking too much to any married man; wouldn’t it, Fuzzy? wouldn’t it, Pussy? So there; and I’ve put the Army List—turned down at the right pages—in your workbox.”

The rest of the morning was now devoted to gossip concerning the flirtations of some of the officers with the town young ladies. This, though (as Daisy feared at moments) it was rather like backbiting, or telling tales out of school, amused her very much; especially the stories told by Fuzzy, who had a good deal of clever humour.

At times Birdie would interrupt in her

wood-quest's, cooing tones by saying, "Oh, shall I tell her such and such a tale?" but was generally stopped by a look of silent warning from one of the others, which passed quite unnoticed over little Miss Dimity's head.

Everything was so new to her; and everybody so kind. It was uncharitable to judge anybody else as uncharitable, she thought, and so put the best construction on all she had heard said by her hostesses that morning.

Nevertheless, when Daisy went up to wash her hands before lunch, it was with a curious sated feeling, as if her mind had been asked to digest a good deal of mental stale jam-tart or some such other palling sweetstuff.

CHAPTER V.

“Had you ever a cousin, Tom?

Did your cousin happen to sing?

Sisters we’ve all by the dozen, Tom,

But a cousin’s a different thing!”

LUNCHEON at the Coxes was really a mid-day dinner, beginning with mutton broth, and ending with oranges and ginger biscuits.

Daisy was privately astonished, however, to see the uncomfortable looks with which the Cox girls regarded their mother as they sat down to it.

“Mamma, I *told* you Miss Dimity always has late dinner at home,” Birdie at length

burst out with, in a petulant tone of suppressed anger.

“My dear, I was sure that Miss Dimity would prefer not to change your papa’s old habits; and that she would not mind taking tea in the evening with us quiet people,” gently answered Mrs. Cox, with a ring of firmness under all her softness of tone.

Of course Daisy warmly agreed, thanking Mrs. Cox for her good opinion.

“But you must think it so vulgar of us,” said Pussy, with a heightened colour.

Now why late dinner or late tea should be made a question of gentility, was more than Daisy could see. Being a good little housekeeper, she knew it was a question of economy; but she would have thought snobbishness should have been in Mrs. Cox having dinner for the guest, if tea was more suited to her means. Daisy disliked

tea; but that was another matter, and she bravely hid the feeling.

After the meal the new-comer, to her infinite satisfaction, was taken out to see the town.

Or rather, whilst she was gazing with delight at the shop windows and interest at the public buildings, the Misses Cox kept their eyes exclusively directed on the passers by, to note any chance officers. At last, as they turned into a public garden, there was a little flutter of delight, and they all exclaimed,

“Here is your brother, Miss Dimity! How good of you to come!” to Jack, as he approached.

“Well, not so very,” replied that young man, in his gruffly honest manner, that never was at pains to flatter anybody, but just told the truth, letting people take it or leave it as they liked. “As this is my

sister's first day here, it would not be very good of me if I didn't come."

Thereupon the Cox girls, declaring they would do "the correct thing," insisted on departing, leaving brother and sister to talk together a few minutes.

"Well, little one," then cried Jack pleasantly, "tell us all about the old place. How are the governor, and the mum, and all the rest of them?"

So at once Daisy's tongue was loosened, and they had a glorious talk; whilst she described everything that had happened to everybody at home, even to the personal appearance of each of the old, black setter's new puppies.

"Well, and how do you like staying with the Coxes, and what do you think of them?" went on Jack at last.

Oh! Mrs. Cox herself was charming. She deserved only ecstatic praise; and in

the delight of having Jack to herself, and thinking how much prospective pleasure they both owed to the family, the Cox girls came in for almost equal enthusiasm from Daisy's voluble little tongue.

Of course she could not say to a *man*—even to her brother—that in some little ways the girls were not *quite* what seemed to her refined and high-minded, as regarded all that fun about Major Hodge, for instance.

Jack would not have understood—would have said that girls always found fault with each other. And Daisy did not like to repeat anything ; and was, besides, too easily delighted to find fault with anybody.

So they rejoined the others, Jack in silent but vast satisfaction that the invitation to his sister, which he had procured—on his honour, now ! he did not know how,

(we may wonder if Mrs. Cox knew)—had turned out such a capital plan.

As they came up, it was evident that Pussy had met her admiring swain in the 170th; who was so soon to lead his flock, *i.e.* the men of his company, to pastures new.

Mr. Jones was a stout young man of bovine appearance, especially as to his black eyes, which stared at Pussy quite unmoved despite all that damsel's attempts to rouse his emotions; *l'agacer*, as the French have it. At present he was seated placidly on a bench, watching a spider eat a fly in a bush; whilst Pussy with little screams of horror was slapping his hand lightly, and calling him a hard-hearted, horrid wretch.

“Here is Mr. Dimity. He will be more gallant,” she uttered, appealingly. “Oh, Mr. Dimity, do save this poor, darling lit-

tle fly—I couldn't bear to touch it myself—and Mr. Jones won't."

"Now, nonsense, Pussy; the spider wants his dinner—I know he does—and if Mr. Dimity takes it away from him *I shall cry!*" plaintively expostulated Birdie, with such a childlike petulance in her accents that both the gentlemen burst out laughing at her.

"What am I to do between both of you?—all I can do is to go away," said Jack, looking from one to the other.

"Yes, do; and I'll go with you," replied Birdie, stealing one covert glance of triumphant victory at her sister.

For Pussy, forsooth, wanted to play off one gentleman against the other, "And I hadn't a notion of her doing that with my property," thought Birdie.

For some time these two "sorted couples," as Fuzzy briefly described the

young ladies and their respective cavaliers strolled through the gardens ; while Miss Cox devoted herself to entertaining Daisy ; doing it, too, with such goodwill that the latter liked her very much, indeed.

“ But now it is time to go home ; for there are some of the other men coming in to tea,” said Fuzzy at last. “ You and I have been sacrificing ourselves long enough doing ‘ gooseberry ’ to these others.”

“ I didn’t know it was a sacrifice. I am so sorry if you found it so, for I like hearing you talk very much,” said truthful Daisy.

Miss Cox looked at her, and said,

“ Dear—I like you !”

Now, how that was meant Daisy could not determine ; for she had heard Jack use the term in a slang sense, signifying, “ I don’t believe a word you say.” And Fuzzy said it with a curious intonation that

might have been sarcastic, or really might have been grave reality.

There was no time to ask ; for just now they had all turned out of the gardens into the street again, and a drove of tired cattle being driven to the butcher came by.

All the cattle had passed, before Birdie came out, except one stray calf which a little boy was now hallooing after the others ; a difficult task, as the poor young creature sometimes refused to stir from fright.

Birdie, being supposed to be very short-sighted, put up her eyeglass ; and, descrying the monster, at once gave a little scream.

“ Oh, a cow ! I am so much afraid of a cow !! Oh, Mr. Dimity—oh, let me run back ; I won’t face it ! ”

Mr. Jones, not being in love with Miss Birdie, laughed in a dull, quiet way ;

the sisters jeered; Jack remonstrated.

“Come along, Miss Cox. Nonsense—look at it boldly; it’s not a cow.”

“Oh! but I can se-e it is” (with a fresh, tiny scream); “it’s a dreadful cow.”

“I tell you it’s not a cow; it’s a calf.”

“Oh! a calf . . . Well, but no matter, *it will be a cow!!!*”

And thereupon back rushed Miss Birdie helter-skelter to the shelter of the gardens.

Jack, after hesitating amid much laughter, naturally had to go after her to escort her back; though, as Fuzzy drily told him, she would come of her own accord very likely—if they left her alone.

These two thus followed the rest of the party home, at some distance behind; defeating thereby any hopes that Fuzzy or poor Daisy might have had as to getting any share of Master Jack’s company.

As to little Miss Dimity, she was silent ; at moments rather losing herself in speculations as to why Birdie, who had seemed to domineer over all the household that morning, should be so babyish and meek in the afternoon.

Also, was it not strange that Jack should treat the three Miss Coxes in such a free and easy fashion, his voice having no shade of respect, but a hail-fellow tone all through it ? He certainly spoke often in that way to Polly at home when she “cheeked” him, as he called it ; but his eldest young sister herself was a damsel of some dignity ; and exacted and really received much deference from all her brothers, although they might tease about her plumpness of person.

Arrived home, they all burst into the drawing-room.

“ Well, mamma ! have you tea ready for

us? Oh! dear, it is not made yet. What a lazy person you are!"

"It is hardly time yet, indeed, my dears. Here are the Miss Smeeths, do you see? They have been sitting, with only me to entertain them, for a quarter of an hour," said Mrs. Cox, gently.

The Cox girls thereupon rushed at two strange young ladies who were sitting by with a demure, expectant air (as if, indeed, they considered that talking to their hostess formed no part at all, and could not even be looked on as a beginning of the entertainment they awaited).

"Oh! dears, we are awfully sorry," cried the Misses Cox, kissing them and patting their visitors' shoulders; "but the truth is, we forgot all about you, or what o'clock it was, when we were in the gardens."

One Miss Smeeth on this cleared her

throat with a very significant "Hem, hem!" The other answered, "We see—too well engaged."

And this she did in such a loud tone, laughing and nodding at Jack as she spoke, that Daisy, who stood by, felt inclined to redden, and hoped he did not hear. For, though she was his sister, Daisy was loyal to her own sex, and was distressed lest he should think the Coxes, or *any* girls, would "run after him," or after any men.

But Jack was quite unconcerned by what was going on between the girls, if, indeed, he heard.

He was paying his respects to Mrs. Cox, in his own brusque fashion, and seemed to like talking to her very much, too; for, in her gentle, languid way, she was equally pleased, repaying the young man by flattery. It was very innocent flattery, only

the praises of his little white terrier and his bigger Clumber spaniels. But, when she talked to young men, poor Mrs. Cox could hardly help speaking in a flattering tone.

“Listen to mamma! She doesn’t know a thing about dogs! not a thing!” burst in Fuzzy, whose interpolations generally acted like bomb-shells in scattering talkers. “Mr. Dimity! Mr. Dimity! I want to know, is the Smiler coming to tea, or is he not? Now, I’m sure you’ve forgotten to give him our message.”

“Then you’re wrong, Miss Cox, for once, let me tell you. Mr. Lee is coming by-and-by, and so is Captain Gascoigne; for I asked them both for you.”

An outburst of jubilation followed. Jack went up to the top of the class in the Miss Coxes’ opinion. To have made Captain Gascoigne come too, was so good of him.

Apparently, without such extraneous aid, they did not expect the latter gentleman to visit them.

“I don’t quite understand—these names get so mixed in my head. Is Mr. Lee not a different person from Mr. Smiler?” asked Daisy, aside, of Miss Cox.

“Oh, dear, no. ‘Smiler’ Lee is only his nickname, because he is such a dear little creature, you know. He is *the* best dancer in the British Army, too! So you thought there was a Mr. Smiler? What a joke! ha, ha! Here he is, coming up the steps, I do declare. I must tell him what you called him.”

“Oh, no, don’t—pray don’t. Remember, he is a stranger to me,” begged poor Daisy, in agony; and only succeeded in persuading Miss Fuzzy to abandon her design as the door opened to admit the subject of their remarks and Captain Gascoigne.

CHAPTER VI.

“I saw him at the Duke Alençon’s once ;
 And much too little of that good I saw,
 Is my report to his great worthiness.

Ros.—Another of these students at that time
 Was there with him ; if I have heard a truth,
 Biron they call him ; but a merrier man,
 Within the limit of becoming mirth,
 I never spent an hour’s talk withal.”

CAPTAIN GASCOIGNE, who entered
 the room before his junior, was
 stared at by Daisy with both her eyes wide
 opened.

For this was Jack’s best friend, though
 some years older than the latter ; the every-
 day hero and the source of constant quo-
 tations of that young man.

Jack had, indeed, admitted that his
 friend Gascoigne was peculiar ; retiring.
 But these admissions had been quite out-

done by his far more frequent declarations of Gascoigne's being "the best fellow in the world," and so forth. While, whenever Jack had been invited to what old Squire Dimity called "swell houses," it had always been under the wing of his friend, so that Daisy was prepared to see "a glass of fashion, and the mould of form."

Daisy felt somewhat disappointed when she saw come in only a tall man, with a very quiet manner, dark brown hair, red, drooping moustache, and a heavy nose. Somehow, she had expected a paladin; some one as handsome as—as Waverley in Sir Walter Scott, or Adonis in "Mangnall's Questions;" brave as Bayard, noble as King Arthur (with the latter qualities quite visible in an indescribable way, of course).

She had heard too much in his praise beforehand, that was it.

But it was not so when she beheld the “Smiler,” who followed Captain Gascoigne with the conscious look of feeling himself a sun beaming out from behind a cloud. He was a smaller, younger man, with the sleekest of sleek heads, best-waxed of moustaches ; so trim and well-made in figure, so faultlessly exquisite in dress.

Captain Gascoigne went straight to Mrs. Cox, and sat down to talk to her, dispersing Jack, unconsciously, with an air as if talking to his hostess was what he had especially come to do.

His gay young subaltern, on the contrary, made a dash for the group of girls, who received him joyously, and closed round him in a circle, of which he seemed to think himself, as they did, the natural centre.

“Ah! Miss Birdie, how well you are looking to-day! Well, Miss Pussy, what

mischievous have you been about lately?—flirting on the quiet, and nearly killing some more fellows, no doubt—What, the two Miss Smeeths here! heart-breakers! Poor Miss Fuzzy, I am so sorry for you. A certain regiment is going away, isn't it? I declare I must get out my handkerchief and help you to cry." And the young fellow verily did pull out his scented silk handkerchief, that in the shade of its border most successfully matched his crimson necktie.

The Smeeth girls, loudly laughing, cried, "Yes, yes; we'll all cry!" pulling out theirs also that were much more coarse, and were better in former retirement.

"Trash! Stop talking nonsense a moment, Mr. Lee, and let me introduce you to Miss Dimity," answered Fuzzy, and on the instant Mr. Lee dropped the subject and his tone of banter; although he began

addressing the new-comer as gaily as he had the others.

He gave Daisy the impression of having been unconsciously acting ever since he entered the room. With all her determination to be very softly indignant and dignified (as a downy dab-chick might) when her sisterhood was lightly addressed, she felt that he had only been saying what he thought would best please everyone. It was all done so lightly—good-humouredly—one saw he was so anxious to be friends with the whole world, to please every living soul—that she must have been a sour female indeed who on first acquaintanceship had found fault with the Smiler when he tried to please !

Now, after interested questions as to her journey, some animated remarks (originated by Daisy) on the weather, and a little discussion upon the architectural appear-

ance of Marstown, Mr. Lee said, sighing, with the same manner of being (unconsciously to himself) acting all the while,

“And so you are come down for our ball? How jolly for Dimity to have a sister to bring down! I know I wish I had a sister—I do indeed, on my honour. Eh, old fellow” (giving Jack a poke in the ribs), “do you hear? I am saying how lucky you are, aren’t you, to have your sister?”

“She’s an awful bother to look after,” growled Master Jack, in his deep voice; with a kindly glance at Daisy, one brief moment, all the same. For his affection took the form of “looking after” his sister; and in his way (if people understood it, as Daisy did) he was very fond of her.

“You old Growler, you ain’t fit to have a sister—and *such* a sister, too!” jocularly scolded Mr. Lee, with an admiring glance at

little Miss Dimity, which the other young ladies, though watching, absolutely did not resent. But then they knew Smiler could not help paying compliments any more than the sun can shining; and custom begat indifference in their minds. "Isn't he a growler, Miss Dimity? Do you know, that is our name for him," went on the young man. And Daisy, laughing heartily, agreed; privately amused—because, though she kept it dark, Jack's home nickname had been such a well-fitting one, that it had likewise suggested itself to the minds of his comrades in arms.

Just then, Mr. Lee was borne lightly away from Daisy's side by a wave of chatter sent to dislodge him by the other young ladies; and Jack took the opportunity to say in Daisy's ear, with some dissatisfaction,

"I wish you had been introduced to

Gascoigne. I must try to manage it. Mind you try to get friends with him,—remember.”

Even as Jack spoke, Captain Gascoigne rose from Mrs. Cox’s side, since two fresh guests had entered; one the irresistible O’Donoghue, reputed “the handsomest man in the British Army;” the other Major Hodge, whom Fuzzy affected.

Glancing a moment gravely at the group of young ladies, thinking that it was now perhaps his secondary duty to speak to his hostess’s daughters, Captain Gascoigne decided in his own mind that they were too much occupied with the new-comers to need him; upon which, with undeviating directness, he walked straight across the room to where Jack and Daisy were together. “Will you introduce me to your sister?” the latter heard him ask in an undertone. And then poor Daisy felt all in

a flutter, for Jack looked so mightily pleased and flattered. Besides, he privately gave her a nudge with his elbow, by way of a reminder that she was to make herself expressly agreeable to *his* friend.

Now, in truth, Miss Dimity was somewhat in awe of her elder brother ; but extremely fond of and anxious to please him.

Still (as she hysterically thought, he *might* remember), she *did* feel such a countrified mouse who had hardly ever spoken to any strange gentlemen in all her life—till she came to Marstown. And also Captain Gascoigne looked so grave and tall as she craned her head to look up at him—while she was a little person in a little chair—that, with all this and the vague knowledge that he went out in London in the season, and was a well-known hunting-man, and visited at great houses, as she had been told—foolish as it may seem, she

began to blush, and the more she tried not to do so, the worse she grew.

Wildly trying to hazard a remark, unhappy Daisy stammered twice, and finally succeeded in observing,

“It’s—it’s a very fine day.”

“Well, that is a very original remark of yours, Daisy—a very fine day! It is so,” satirically put in Jack.

The poor little girl was covered with confusion, and, knowing Jack thought her a fool, felt a vast disposition to weep; whilst her brother looked down on her in brotherly displeasure, and Captain Gascoigne with pity. Suddenly seating himself beside her, he said, good-naturedly,

“Well, do you know, Miss Dimity, though your brother may laugh at us, *that is the very same remark I was about to make to you!*”

Whether this was within miles of the

truth or not (Daisy believed it like gospel), it made everything smooth ; and the three found themselves chatting quite gaily together ; although, of course, Daisy had been much more at her ease with Mr. Lee, of whom nobody could stand in awe.

“What do you think of the belles of Marstown? There are two of them—the Miss Smeeths. Do you admire them very much?” Captain Gascoigne by-and-by asked ; looking over, with an unmoved countenance, to where the youngest Miss Smeeth, a buxom, black-eyed gipsy, was sitting on a little table dangling her feet. Indeed, at times, as she grew excited in discoursing with Captain O'Donoghue, she was swinging them with a will.

“Well, no—not that one,” Daisy hesitatingly said, with secret disapproval.

“What! not admire the fair Esther?” struck in Jack, in a terribly audible

undertone. "I am surprised at you, old girl!—rank jealousy! What do you think of the eldest one, then,—Miss Grace?—'Ease and Grace,' as they are called by some of us."

(Captain Gascoigne gave him a cautioning look.)

"I think she looks rather like a bone crochet-needle," laughed Daisy, utterly forgetting the presence of Captain Gascoigne, and answering Jack as she was used.

Both her hearers laughed, too, for, as they looked across the room, the likeness was really most striking.

Miss Smeeth was tall, thin, and straight, but that her head was takingly drooped, which, with its pale hair, ivory complexion, and aquiline nose, suggested the comparison. Hergrey dress, of an economically non-descript hue, suitable for all seasons, was

fastened up the back by an outburst of buttons ; and was as tight as tight could be round her thin figure ; except that just above the knees a scarf of the same stuff was tied round, as if with the primary intention of adding some drapery. This attempt to disguise her form had plainly been repented of afterwards by the young lady, since the final effect was to make her look tighter than ever.

“I never saw such bad dressers in my life as the girls in Marstown. Did you ?” observed Jack to his friend, with bluntness ; feeling stirred to talk freely by the unusual occurrence of being with his sister and friend in company. “It’s my belief that girl hasn’t another gown to put on her back. I’ve never seen her in any other, I know.”

“Oh, come—though I hardly ever remark ladies’ dresses—I think I have,”

replied Captain Gascoigne, in a kindly though slow manner. "Surely, there was a black dress in which I have seen one——"

"Seen both in turns," interrupted Jack, with brutal frankness. "One wears it with blue ribbons, and the other with red on state occasions, and the other one lies in bed that day. They fight about whose turn it is for a party : so some other young ladies, their dearest friends, confided to me, and box each other's——"

"*Jack !* you should be ashamed of yourself," interrupted Daisy, with flashing eyes. "It was a shame of any girl to tell you such things about another ; and it is very unkind to laugh at their dress, for they must be miserably poor to have only one ; and *I* think it is a great pity of them."

"Quite right, Miss Dimity. You had no idea, had you, that gentlemen were such

terrible gossips?" said Captain Gascoigne, smiling at her.

"It's all very fine of you to come down on me like a cart-load of bricks; but who was it called Miss Smeeth a crochet-needle?"

"I'm very sorry now I did, then, Jack——"

Their conversation was suddenly stopped. Birdie was calling out, in a plaintive tone,

"I say, everybody, don't you all think it is very stuffy here? Let us have tea on the roof--Fuzzy, don't begin pouring it out here."

There ensued a clamour of voices; all the young ladies seconding the plan, as also the gay "Smiler," who was always ready for any kind of action. Poor Mrs. Cox, flushing slightly, kept objecting in faint murmurs.

"Oh, no, Baby dear—it was such a fuss

last time ! Pussy—remember that it gives Mary ” (the servant) “ so much more trouble ! Fuzzy—you know there were so many tea-cups broken, before !”

But she was utterly overborne.

The gentlemen, to do them all justice, preserved perfect neutrality of expression till the dispute should be ended ; except that big Major Hodge, shrugging his broad shoulders, observed in an undertone,

“ Provided that I am not expected to carry anything !”

“ Oh ! you are always lazy !” exclaimed Birdie, turning upon him in contempt. “ Let us carry the tea ourselves upstairs, girls. We needn’t bother the servant, mamma. Mr. Lee, you’ll help us ?”

Lee sprang gallantly to aid the distressed damsel, who appealed plaintively to Jack also ; the movement being indeed a ruse on her part to detach either Dimity or Gas-

coigne—"her men"—from their undue engrossment with Daisy.

The Cox mansion was thus built. On the first-floor a little entry, dignified by the name of hall, with room for the umbrella-stand; to left the very moderately-sized dining-room; to right the lesser study, sacred to the doctor. Second story: to left the drawing-room; to right Mrs. Cox's bed-room; on the landing, a case of stuffed humming-birds, in the dark corner, not to be looked at too closely, as rather touched by time or moths; still producing a good effect, Mrs. Cox hoped.

Higher up: the bed-rooms sacred to the Misses Cox, and to the guest.

Still higher: three attics, in which slept the three women-servants, and the two little Cox schoolboys, whom nobody but their mother much minded; in whose living existence many people almost disbelieved,

since the doctor thought little boys of their age plagues.

From the landing here, a short ladder led to a trap-door opening on the roof, which was protected by the house-wall being built a little higher than the edge of the slates, to give the villa a more imposing air from the street. And up here, mounting the ladder, and squeezing through the trap-door, all the company went; laughing, pushing, carrying the tea-things, or dropping them in some instances.

CHAPTER VII.

“So fast a friend, so foe to few,
So good to every wight,
I well may wish, but scarcely hope,
Again to have in sight.”

DAISY was the last but one to mount the ladder to the roof. Captain Gascoigne was the very last.

He had shown an almost manifest reluctance to take his tea on the slates, as Daisy, who had been nearest to him, perceived; but the Cox girls were too excited, and the Smeeths too (femininely) uproarious to notice it.

“Here, Miss Dimity,” cried one of the girls, as Daisy emerged, and found all the

company sitting in a row on the sooty slates, with their feet in the lead gutter-pipe, while the top of the house-wall made a low breastwork before them, "as if on purpose to put one's cup on," declared Birdie. "Here, Miss Dimity, won't you come here, dear, between Miss Smeeth and me? We have kept a little corner for you. And won't you come *here*, Captain Gascoigne?"

"Here" meant beside Pussy; who was tired of Mr. Jones, since that excellent, dull youth merely gazed at her with expressionless black orbs, and kept silence generally; except that at times, after a violent heaving of his body being perceptible, he would give vent to a great rumbling laugh—the cause of which he generally refused to state.

But Gascoigne declared he was too tall to sit doubled up like the rest with com-

fort; and, politely adding that he would like to be in readiness to go down into the house below for hot water or anything needed, could not be induced to come up the ladder higher than just allowed him to put out his head and arms, and drink the tea which Pussy tenderly handed to him.

“You look like Jack-in-the-box! Doesn’t Captain Gascoigne look a real muff stuck in the trap-door there, Mr. Lee?” jeeringly exclaimed Miss Grace Smeeth, who permitted herself as much freedom of tongue as her sister did ease of body. “Why can’t he be nice and *friendly* like you, and come and join us?”

“Hush! Miss Smeeth. Fie, fie! He might have heard you.”

“I don’t care a straw. He’s not a pal of mine, and never could be; so what need it matter to me?”

“He’s not very far wrong either,

though," said the young fellow, with a half embarrassed laugh, "for he can't be seen from the street where he is, but we all can; and what on earth will all the people we know think of us, for there is your sister throwing down bits of plaster on the passers-by."

Certainly Miss Esther Smeeth had calmly seated herself on the parapet, and was, from this airy vantage-post, bombarding any chance wayfarers with bits of Roman cement picked off by her own fair fingers; while keeping up a brisk second fire of rail-lery against Jack Dimity, and as usual swinging her legs. Suddenly Birdie was seen to be very risibly affected, as she looked at the rival who had temporarily succeeded in alluring Jack's attentions from herself.

She whispered to Pussy, who seemed also highly tickled; then both "passed it on" to Mr. Jones; who, however, though

he nodded his heavy head and smiled, hardly seemed to consider the joke equally excellent. Next, Fuzzy heard and imparted it to Major Hodge, who sat nearest her in the row, and Daisy, who was close by, could not avoid (literally) eavesdropping. The joke was "Look at Miss Smeeth's *stockings!*"

Just at the heels, peeping above her low, out-door shoes, was a large hole in each.

"Tidy, isn't it?" said Fuzzy, laughing affectedly; for she rather feared often that her major had thoughts of deserting to the enemy, and was not sorry that her dear friend should thus expose herself to unkind criticism.

"I hope you have marked, learnt, and mean to inwardly digest that."

"Haw, haw! What, digest the stockings? No, thank you; I'm afraid they

would be rather too much for me," replied the big major, with a great laugh.

Then wishing to tease Fuzzy, whose jealousy he knew; but being a good-humoured man in small matters, he added,

"Poor little girl! They are rather badly off, you know; so I think it's rather a shame to laugh at her."

"Well, really, darning-cotton is cheap, and I suppose she has the use of her fingers," said Fuzzy, smartly, for the Cox girls dressed better than most of the Marstown young ladies, to do them justice; and spent all their spare time in making up new clothes, while their mother used superhuman efforts to keep their old ones neat and tidy.

At this moment, the young lady with the faulty stockings became aware of the general gaze being directed upon herself; and asked,

“Mr. Dimity, what is the matter? Do look at my feet, and tell me if there is anything wrong with them.”

Jack stooped down and did as requested.

“There’s nothing wrong with your *feet*,” he said, in his bluff way, “but there is with your stockings.”

“Jumping Jehosaphat!” muttered the young lady, as she inspected the damage.

She was supposed to have the smallest feet in Marstown, and, though very badly off, did her best to keep them well booted; so now, though she sat up defiantly and kicked her feet again, there was a sparkle of tears in her eyes.

“Laugh away, all of you! *I* don’t want to stop you,” she said, addressing them all. “Only this much let me tell you, there was not a hole in these when I started. But we had a long walk here, and these are the only pair of black-silk stockings I

ever owned in the world—— So they are rather old, I will say; but I can't afford to buy any others till my ship comes in."

"Bravo! Don't be ashamed of yourself, Miss Esther," applauded Smiler Lee.

"Only draws attention to very pretty ankles," said Jack, in a tone of gruff consolation.

Captain Gascoigne added, speaking across several others,

"No one could have taken our teasing more good-humouredly, at all events, Miss Smeeth."

"Our" teasing! He had certainly not helped in the laugh against her. Praise from Gascoigne was so rare, and he was usually so quiet, that Miss Smeeth thanked him with a more vivid pleasure than her other defenders had given her, although so lately declaring he was "no pal of hers."

"That man always says a kind word

whenever he can, that I must say for him—but the rest are so spiteful!” vehemently asseverated the other Smeeth sister—who had called Gascoigne a “muff”—addressing Daisy, in an undertone. “Oh, I was watching you, Miss Dimity, and you didn’t laugh; so I don’t mind saying to you what I feel about it. And Birdie Cox is always like that, though she pretends to be such a friend of ours. But I’m sure, you know how new shoes nip at the heel.”

Daisy did know (especially cheap ones with a hard edge, as she inwardly thought). She was honestly sympathising, and Miss Smeeth seemed somewhat comforted.

Major Hodge again infused good-humour into the now jarring elements by remarking—

“I knew a lady—an awfully pretty woman, too—who was going out to a ball one night and found she had a hole, too, in

her black-silk stockings, so what d'ye all think she did? Give it up!—why *inked it* with the feather end of a quill pen. Ha, ha! capital plan.”

Just at this moment some one announced that more passers-by were seen coming up the road. The road, which rejoiced in the name of Kyber Pass, was lined with genteel villas, and not much frequented.

“Let us all lay in ammunition to bombard the enemy,” cried Mr. Lee, gaily, crouching behind the parapet, and preparing tiny cement pellets.

Most of the party eagerly followed suit. For Mrs. Cox having slipped away (to do some of the daintier cooking, unsuspected, in the kitchen regions) there was no check upon them, and the fun grew fast and furious.

At first, the bullets were so small that they either missed their mark, or, if felt,

the persons in the street thought it was some mistake on their own parts; since, on looking up, they could see no one—all heads being well hidden.

But soon this seemed tame, and bits of bread and butter, biscuits, and lumps of sugar were used regardless of consequences.

Daisy, who took no part in this, began to grow extremely uncomfortable.

She had not felt exactly happy on the roof from the first; but now she felt decidedly unhappy, and somewhat ashamed of her friends' proceedings.

"Won't your sister join us? What a quiet little mouse she is!" said some of the other girls to Jack Dimity, as Daisy resisted demurely all their appeals to do as they did.

"Come along, Daisy, won't you?" called out the young man thus urged, and then, seeing disinclination in his sister's rosy

face, he edged himself along the slates to add, in an undertone, "What's up? What's the matter?"

"Oh! Jack dear, I'd rather not—really. It doesn't seem to me very—very *nice*," (that adjective of universal feminine application presenting itself helpfully, as being neither too strong nor too weak).

"Nice!" repeated Jack, in a tone of scorn that withered the poor little word. "Oh! well, if you like to stick by yourself, I've nothing to say against it. Only it looks rather as if you were setting yourself up as the only person among us that knows how to behave properly."

And away he crawled again, before he could get any answer.

The truth was, he was annoyed at his sister's scruples, when he had been vastly enjoying himself; and yet he would not say she was wrong.

A forlorn, small, so-called Pharisee gazed, rather miserably after him ; being grieved at the idea of accusing anyone ; when a friendly-sounding voice said from the trap-door—the near neighbourhood of which she and Jack had quite forgotten,

“Do you know much about heraldry, Miss Dimity?”

“Heraldry? No, not much—a little. Grandpapa used to be rather fond of studying it, though ; and I used to help him by looking out bits about it in the winter evenings,” said Daisy, starting, and rather blushing at acknowledging the hobby of the grand-paternal haberdasher ; to which the Dimitys owed their crest and coat-of-arms, and, indeed, some very vague ancestors, whom the old gentleman believed in with all the pride of a discoverer. “Why do you ask me?”

“Because you may remember how a cat

or a greyhound is represented sitting *sejant*, with their forepaws put straight out before them. Look, now, at all the rest of our party—at Miss Smeeth especially! Is she not sitting *sejant*?”

Captain Gascoigne, as he said so, gave a quiet laugh of intense enjoyment that quite surprised Daisy. Looking at him, she also noticed that he raised his nose—a large and solid feature this was in his face, too—as if the same nose took a most especial share in all enjoyment going on. It was a trick of habit he had.

“I declare you are right. It is perfectly true!” she exclaimed, turning to gaze at the rest of the party.

They were all sitting crouched in a row on the slates, with their feet stuck out before them, just as if they were going to play hunt the slipper.

“You are not among the worshippers of

Asmodeus, I think?" went on Captain Gascoigne.

"Asmodeus? I am afraid I don't know. Was he in 'Mangnall's Questions'?" asked little Miss Dimity, rather confused.

"That I really cannot inform you; but perhaps he might be found in 'Pinnock's Catechism, or the Child's Guide to Useful Knowledge.' He was the god of roofs."

"O-h! And you think I am unsociable, as Jack does, because I don't much like being up here; but—but really, Captain Gascoigne, it makes me feel a little giddy."

"You were never so high in your life before. Exactly so, Miss Dimity; that is my feeling too; but don't you see the rest are giddy too, and like it?"

The speaker's tone was quizzically kindly; as if he did not believe in Daisy's excuse in the least, but rather approved of it.

A perfect jubilee!—suppressed, delighted

calls and giggles from the rest, now attracted their attention. All the sharpshooters were peering out, cautiously, at some fresh victims coming up the street below.

"Who are they, Miss Dimity, can you tell me?" asked Gascoigne, who could neither see nor be seen in his prudent lair.

"They are two old ladies dressed in black; the Miss Silverthornes, I hear them say."

"Come along, Miss Dimity—oh, do come! And, Captain Gascoigne, you will never have such an opportunity in your life again. These two are the most horrible old cats!" bawled Easy Smeeth, in a loud whisper.

"They are two very well-bred and good old ladies, *I* have always thought," said Gascoigne, very slowly and quietly to Daisy, quite reddening. "I think Miss

Smeeth does not know them herself, and is rather severe upon them. If you will excuse me, Miss Dimity, I will slip downstairs, not to seem to have a share in what might possibly annoy old friends of mine."

"Then please let me go down with you; for I don't like it at all either," whispered Daisy, in a hurry. And silently agreeing, with a pleased look, Gascoigne was preparing to help her quickly to escape, when—unknown to himself, the catastrophe he had dreaded occurred.

He rose out of the trap, to allow her to descend first; and his tall figure was outlined on the roof. At that moment, without his seeing it, the two old ladies looked up and recognised him. Two seconds more, and he was in safety hurrying down the stairs with Daisy; but not before both had beheld a small shower of cake, sugar,

and soot-lumps flung down upon the pedestrians.

“The Miss Silverthornes could not have seen me, could they?” asked Gascoigne, as they gained the drawing-room, in a tone of severity that made Daisy positively start, as, coming after his usual quiet drawl, it took one aback.

She was silent, fearing the old ladies could.

He, however, re-assured himself, apparently being superior to her opinion, and added blandly, after thoughtfully pulling his moustache,

“Oh, no, they could not. I am very glad of it.”

“Are they great friends of yours?” Daisy ventured to ask.

“Well, hardly great friends, Miss Dimity; for you must consider they are really old ladies, and, indeed, I have only seen them

a few times now, though they knew me as a child. But I know something of their relations. They are of a good old county family, and were obliged by bad circumstances to leave a charming home they had to come to Marstown, where they have very few friends; so I rather feel for them. They live next door, you know."

"Indeed! in that tiny house? Then of course Mrs. Cox knows them; and I think I should like to see them very much from what you say, poor ladies!"

Captain Gascoigne gazed at the carpet, so that Miss Dimity, looking innocently full at his face, hardly caught a twinkle in his eye.

"N-o; I don't think Mrs. Cox does know them, nor do the Miss Smeeths either. The fact is, these old ladies don't much care for society, at which some people here seem rather offended."

“Oh!” replied Miss Dimity, in an astonished undertone, wondering all the more at the late scene.

But Gascoigne stopped her from longer consideration.

Being a methodical man, he was aware this was an excellent chance of doing his duty in making himself agreeable to his friend’s sister; so, having seated himself comfortably, he began to do so—at least, according to his own idea thereof, like the best of us.

By-and-by, he found himself quite *au fait* as to the whole history of why and how Miss Dimity had found herself staying at the Coxes. Truly without any intention of “drawing” her, a few judicious questions soon brought out all that was brimming over in such an unsophisticated mind. Daisy quite forgot her fear of strange gentlemen, and of this one in particular;

for he, instead of being grave, now looked quite smiling; and was most friendly, though so quiet.

“And so this is your very first introduction into gaieties and society,” he said at last, sleepily, with quite a benignant smile. “Well; what is the next entertainment to be, that you are going to?”

“Oh, we are to hear the band play to-morrow evening in the Gardens, and then have late tea with the Smeeths. The Miss Coxes told me it was *so* pleasant!” cried Daisy, delightedly. “Are you not coming, too, to hear the band. They told me everyone would be there.”

The tall man beside her silently shook his head. Till then he had sat bent forward, in a sort of attentive manner, as if politeness kept him from leaning back in a lady's presence. Now he positively played with

the fringe of an antimacassar. (Who will invent a less odious, but universal name for that useful article?)

“You see, I have heard so many bands that they are no longer the utter rarity to me that they are to a young lady fresh from the country and her school-room, like yourself.”

“The truth is, you are *blasé*, I suppose—and sick of society, like the people one reads of in novels; but I have always thought that is a very bad frame of mind, and it must be good for everyone to mix with their neighbours,” retorted Miss Dimity, positively assuming a reproving air as of a coquettish, newly-hatched chicken taking on itself to lecture a farm-yard-weary game-fowl, whose spurs were long since won. But then she shyly added, “I am so sorry if you are not really coming; for really strangers frighten me.”

Gascoigne positively laughed at this, but said, after a while,

“ Well, yes ; I think I must go this time ; if only after that dreadful reproach of yours, of being *blasé*.” Then looking quite warmly at the fresh face and dewy, forget-me-not eyes opposite him, he added, “ I cannot help wondering what you will think of a garrison town and of garrison society ! It must be so utterly different from the green fields, and quiet home surroundings, you have been brought up in. What do you do here ? How do you like it ? ”

Daisy’s tongue was quite unloosed by his cordial manner, and she described all her impressions ; and how they had spent the morning in “ chatting—in doing nothing but chat—— ”

“ What about ? ”

“ Oh, a hundred things ” (with shame-faced evasion).

“Did not the Miss Coxes talk about any of the officers in the garrison?” (A sly question so mildly and insinuatingly put, in an honest way, by Captain Gascoigne, that his little interlocutor walked unsuspectingly into the trap).

Well—Daisy owned they did; but indeed the names quite confused her brain, and, having met no officers, she did not care to talk about them very much.

“But did you all do *nothing* but talk?—from breakfast to lunch? Surely a young lady who teaches her young brothers generally all morning, as you tell me you do, must have found talking about gentlemen in red coats *all* morning rather a waste of time, Miss Dimity” (unfairly making a large inference as to the morning’s talk, from her guileless admission, and pursuing it. “Did you not do any crochet, or hemming, or tatting.”)

“Well, really, it did seem a whole morning lost—only I should not like the Miss Coxes to know I thought so, they are all so very kind. For, you see, Captain Gascoigne, besides teaching the boys at home, I always like two hours to keep up my own studies. Polly and I both agreed, it would not be right to forget everything we had learnt, as soon as the governess left us. But as to work—crochet and tatting are old-fashioned. You should look at my lovely, new, floss-silk embroidery. Please do.” And, with pardonable pride, this industrious young Penelope seized her workbox to display the treasure of needlework. This Captain Gascoigne, being very short-sighted, bent down to examine closely, with deep interest.

Down rolled a gold thimble, which Daisy stooped to hunt for. After three seconds

of search, she raised herself successful and glowing.

“ Well, Captain Gascoigne ? Please say you approve of my work.”

Then she stood rooted to the ground with dismay, and blushing like the veriest field-poppy ; scarlet, and yet more scarlet ; as her brother’s friend of friends—the grave, tall man, whose kindness had almost banished the awe his dignified reserve had caused in her simple soul—said, in a gravely sarcastic tone,

“ Oh ! yes ; and, of course, as an officer in Her Majesty’s service, I ought equally to approve of your morning’s studies, Miss Dimity,” showing, hidden under her pretty embroidery, the ragged cover and dog’s-eared pages of the “ Army List,” opening in such a tell-tale fashion of its own accord. Alas ! she had quite forgotten that Birdie Cox had thrust it in there. * * * *

It was a little dull that evening after tea ; or else Daisy was dispirited. The doctor, however, was cheery, always cheery ! he loudly declared, rubbing his hands, and challenging Daisy to play backgammon.

She was surprised to see, when she accepted, that the rest looked upon her with eyes of evident pity. This was explained later by her winning the first three games ; after which the doctor's geniality (that had been vanishing since his first loss) utterly melted into air. Daisy at last, perceiving what was wrong, allowed him to win ; congratulating herself on her *finesse*. But alas ! she had rejoiced too soon, for her host then proposed more and still more games, till she was quite weary, and he was triumphant.

CHAPTER VIII.

“Let never maiden think, however fair,
She is not fairer in new clothes than old.”

SOME people, when secretly ashamed of themselves, sulk. Others, while trying to hide their misbehaviour, are suspiciously humble (as you may also remark in a poor dog of tender conscience), and are most anxious to do private penance by little acts of unusual kindness to other people.

Daisy Dimity belonged to the latter class of secret sinners.

On the morning after she had fallen so desperately in Captain Gascoigne's and her

own good opinion, she rose with her feelings quite sensibly depressed, and her rosy face sobered in expression. At breakfast (to which the three young ladies came ten minutes later than the morning before) Mrs. Cox told her daughters that a message had just come from the sempstress whom they frequently employed, that her mother was dying, so she could not come to sew for them.

There was general consternation.

“Bother her mother! My ball-dress is in rags at the tail. I know it was all that stupid Major Hodge’s spurs at the last dance; and I never could sew for myself; so there is no use trying,” wailed Birdie, throwing a vindictive glance at her eldest sister, who reasonably replied,

“Well, you don’t suppose *I* can prevent him wearing spurs, do you? My own dress wants about two dozen yards of

ruching to hide the stains of the green pea-soup that Captain O'Donoghue spilt over my shoulders that night after the concert, when he was bear-fighting with little Lee. I declare they behave as badly sometimes with us, as if they were in their mess-room. Well, I suppose I must find time to help you, Baby—though why you can't stitch as Pussy and I have always had to do, beats me."

"And I will help you too, my child," put in Mrs. Cox; though with a secret sigh; thinking of the various dishes for the guest she dared not trust to the cook, and the little schoolboys' socks, and heaven knows what more!

Pussy remained discreetly silent, but—

"Let *me* sew for you," exclaimed little Miss Dimity's fresh voice. "Yes, indeed I will. You must let me make up your dress, every bit."

And she kept her word—even more fully than she had anticipated.

For, Birdie's dress proving by daylight so ragged and dirty when exposed to view that poor Mrs. Cox blushed on seeing it laid out, the latter hurried into the town to buy yards of tarlatane to veil its deficiencies.

“You darling! You will make it up for me *exactly* like the Princess of Wales's dress described in *The Queen*, won't you?” exclaimed Birdie, ecstatically, curling herself down on the hearth-rug, and looking up at Daisy, who was energetically handling big scissors, and threading needles, and making a scientific apparent litter.

“Listen to it here: ‘A jupe of the richest creamy satin, bouillonné, veiled with tulle illusion, tunic cut *en inimitable*, *relevé* with bouquets of choicest stove-

housium orchidaceæ, mixed with sprays of diamonds——’”

“Exactly! Oh, you can easily make that!” sarcastically interposed Fuzzy, from where she bent over the sewing-machine, speaking with her mouth full of pins.

“Never mind the diamonds, and, of course, I can’t afford the flowers,” valiantly declared the youngest Miss Cox. “But my jupe is cream-satine, anyhow; and it can be veiled with tarlatane instead of tulle illusion, just as well; can’t it, my own sweetest helper?” affectionately addressing her guest.

Daisy, bending over the gown in question, could not help thinking that cotton-satine is a very different stuff from richest real satin; also that the jupe or skirt in question had plainly once been snow-white, but now was merely yellowish from age—Isabel-hue, as the French term it—while

tarlatane at eight-pence a yard (double width) is useful and cleanly, but could hardly look quite as diaphanous as the royal robe.

There was very little talking this morning, except on the all-absorbing subject of dress; the stitchers being too busy. Birdie indeed, sitting lazily on the hearth-rug, had begun some banter against her elder sisters; but was absolutely told, to her secret indignation, that, if she could not sew, or be otherwise useful, she could at least keep from disturbing them. And, to carry out the first hint, Daisy, being a practical-minded young person, to the lazy young lady's astonishment, gave her several simple jobs: basting-threads to pull out; tucks to turn down.

Birdie dared not refuse their guest, but sat with her yellow head crossly down-bent,

and her sharp little nose growing red at the tip with vexation.

Daisy silently remarked this as her needle flew shining down long seams, and it set her thinking of another nose. Of a very different, ugly nose, but one that held itself up in an honest, lordly way above all things mean. It was a most honest nose in its expression, no doubt, but sometimes assumed too much the character of a self-righteous judge in Miss Dimity's opinion; and her cheeks grew red all over at the memory of yesterday's misadventure.

The worst was, there had been no explanation after the awful "find."

Dumfounded, Daisy had stood under Gascoigne's gaze; and before she could speak in exculpation, long, indeed, before her shame-stricken small wits were gathered together, the rest of the party had

entered, seeming to flood the room with talk.

“Don’t you like old Gascoigne?” Jack had admiringly muttered to his sister; and the latter at last raising her eyes had seen a tall figure just disappearing from the room, who had not thought it necessary to say good-bye to all the guests after taking his leave of Mrs. Cox.

Daisy had faintly murmured back an “Oh, yes,” not knowing what to say; feeling much disposed in her annoyance to answer No!—and to detest that vanishing reddish-brown, square head.

Just now, with that curious sympathy between thoughts that no one has yet explained, Daisy was startled on being suddenly asked by Pussy,

“Oh! do tell us, by-the-way, how you liked Captain Gascoigne yesterday. You quite ran off with him from us all, didn’t

she? I mean, dear, you made a decided impression."

"Then it was more than I cared to do," quoth little Miss Dimity, decidedly; the tinge of jealousy in the speaker's tone not having been lost upon her.

There was such a ring of honesty in Daisy's words that no one could ever doubt their utter sincerity.

"What! Did you really not like him, then?—Why don't you like him?—What is it you don't like about him?"

This avalanche of questions was rained in astonishment down on Daisy's head.

"I am not quite sure yet; but I think I dis—like him" (very slowly). "And I can't tell you all why." (That would have been to reveal the work-box episode.) Then, with a happy inspiration, "He has such a terribly ugly nose!"

They all laughed at her. Fancy mind-
ing a man's nose!

But yet in a somewhat suspicious manner Pussy and Birdie agreed with their little guest. It was an enormous nose. It was square at the end; a perfect handle to the poor man's face.

Only Fuzzy softly whistled at all this, till nearly choking herself with half swallowing a pin. Then suddenly, while work was going on in full swing, and the sewing machine buzzing like a dozen hives of bees, it was stopped with a jerk, and bang went Fuzzy's cuffs on the floor.

"I never can work properly with cuffs on; in fact, they always make me feel miserable," she explained to Daisy.

"Well, if one is doing any hard or dirty work, I take off mine too," honestly replied the other.

After a few more seconds, however,

Fuzzy gave an impatient pull at her throat, and twitch—away came her collar, which was only held in its place by a single humpbacked pin. It followed its cousins, the cuffs, to degradation on the floor.

“I declare one is in comfort now,” said Fuzzy; neck and wrists appearing strangely out of her coarse serge dress, unrelieved by any white. “If it wasn’t that they all agree it is my line to shoot my cuffs, and sport a round collar like a man, I’d never wear any.”

“Oh, but, Fuzzy, you *must*! We can’t all go in for the same sort of thing, you know—three in a family, all eating up each other’s chances,” interposed Birdie, turning eagerly to Daisy. “Don’t you agree? It was my idea; I settled when I came out that we must try to be different, so Fuzzy has to go in for talking sport to the men—hunting and betting, you know, and a

little slang" (with a small, deprecatory laugh). "But Pussy is the quietest of us all, and reads most, so she has to be the blue-stockings of the family. I wanted her to take to parish work and curates, for she is just made for it."

"But I won't, so there's an end of it! I'll either marry a soldier and live in barracks, or not at all. It's too much for you to be the tyrant of us all in everything, Baby. You've taken good care to take the easiest line of us all, so that should satisfy you," interposed Pussy, hardly raising her usual soft tones, but with a quiet venom that showed she could be dangerous when angered. She went on :

"If *you* had to read, whether you liked it or not, to keep up your reputation, see what you would say ! The other day, there was Captain Gascoigne asked me if I had not read Mr. Gladstone's famous speech,

eight columns long, and was so surprised when I said that I had not, because he said my sister had told him I was so fond of politics. So I read it all up the next day—ugh! two hours of it. But it was a week before we met him again, and when I tried, and tried hard, to begin talking about this great speech and the Irish Question, he told me calmly at last that it was a thing of the past already, and that nobody spoke of anything now but the new Eastern complication. Complication, indeed! I loathe the very sight of the leading articles.”

“And I hate horses, and abominate betting,” burst in Fuzzy—pausing to join Pussy in the tempting opportunity of venting their real feelings for once. “I never can quite understand all about the odds, Miss Dimity, and there! if I didn’t go and bet at the last regimental races with a horrible man in the commissariat who flirts

with Essie Smeeth, and before I knew he had won a pair of gloves from me. I could have cried!—but I had to pay up, because Essie laughed at me so about it. And, as to talking about horses after my reading up in *that* all about curbs and spavins, and I don't know what all—little Smiler Lee chaffed me so one day when he took me a ride; for I was in such a fright, I kept saying my prayers all the time.”

With a laughing grimace at the recollection—for Fuzzy's sorrows over her lost *rôle* were by no means so deep as Miss Pussy's at being blue—she pointed out a large book to Daisy that lay somewhat hidden from sight.

“Why, it is ‘On the Horse,’ the very same that papa keeps in his growlery at home, at Elm Hall!” exclaimed Daisy, opening her eyes. “You don't say you read up that? I do pity you.”

Fuzzy nodded, with a resigned sort of grin; and sent the sewing-machine flying harder than ever. But Birdie laughed maliciously, and rolled full length on the hearth-rug, delighted to think that the line of life she had kept to herself was that of the *ingénue* of the family, the spoilt Baby, who could not be expected to be either useful or deeply read.

None of the girls felt in the least shy, it seemed, of pouring all these confidences into the ears of their guest. They were not reticent by nature; and no new-comer could have been less alarming than this one, who simply opened her blue eyes wider and wider in innocent astonishment, but no more thought of looking severe than would a pigeon.

Suddenly Fuzzy, whose post near the bay-window commanded a view down the street's full length, rose rather hastily and said,

"I quite forgot, I want to do some shopping very much before lunch. Which of you will come with me? If we hurry, we can be just in time."

The other sisters, for some reason or other, both at once looked out down the street, and then smiled significantly.

"Really, Fuzzy, I cannot leave my own dress to go running into the town at all hours with you," purred Pussy. "Such a time of day to take, too. Besides, it's really of no use."

"Well, then, you can come, Birdie; you're doing nothing, I am sure," said the elder sister, sharply.

"Why on earth can you not go alone, *as I do*, if I want to meet anyone? You are old enough, Goodness knows! Go out this morning? No, indeed; I am too lazy."

"Indeed, so you are!" bitterly murmured

Fuzzy, who had a good heart, and, from Birdie's infancy, had been fond of and spoilt the younger sister, who now tyrannised over them all. She was, besides, with all her affectation of loudness, the most weak of the trio. "I hate going alone, and you know it. It looks so like running after——"

She stopped abruptly as Daisy, who had sprung up from her work, joined them.

"Let me go. I love shopping. I shan't keep you *one moment* while I put on my things." And away she flew.

(N.B. It is only strong-minded ladies who do not love shopping; or will own they require more than *one second* to put on their things !)

CHAPTER IX.

“I promised to buy her a bunch of blue riband
To tie up her bonny brown hair.”

AS the two girls emerged equipped, Daisy noticed that her companion's eyes were eagerly following a man's figure, which was just disappearing round the street-corner.

“We were too slow in dressing!” ungratefully escaped from Fuzzy, with a sigh, and she began walking very fast. Daisy did not know the cause of the hurry, but nevertheless hastened beside her at a great pace.

“What are you going to buy?” she presently asked, rather short of breath.

Miss Cox looked at her.

“Oh! well, I am not sure what first;—there are several things.”

They had gained the street-corner, and again Fuzzy gazed eagerly ahead.

It was a short, deserted alley; and again Daisy saw the same big figure, walking as far before them as before.

As if she had seen her goal, Miss Cox began hastening faster than ever, so they dived into a net-work of lanes, and they scurried over crossings, knocked against blind beggars, and were nearly run over by drays, cabs, and hand-carts—till Daisy, who was plump and short of person, perfectly panted, although in good condition; and began to feel as if this were, somehow, a positive race.

“Do you much mind going quick? I like it so much better than sauntering,” asked Fuzzy, with a gasp in her own

breath. "Isn't it—dreadful—how much faster men can go than we—although they don't—look—as if they hurried?"

She was looking at a gentleman ahead, who was going with easy strides, lurching a little in his walk, and twirling a cane. He looked marvellously like the very figure they had first seen when they came out; and, if so, had humiliatingly kept his advantage in point of distance.

And now they had got into the High Street, full of shops and passengers, among which latter groups the person in front of them was frequently lost to view. But Daisy could not help perceiving that her companion's whole gaze and aim seemed directed on preventing this event occurring; and that they dodged to right or left, regardless of the rule of the road, and of irate old ladies, simply as was dictated by

the movements of the individual in front.

Daisy now began to feel certain her new friend was leading her on a chase; and could hardly restrain her girlish laughter. Being fond, also, of going out hunting with the squire, she felt a horrible longing to cry "Forrard—farrard!" or "Whoo-whoop!"

She was most thankful, now, she had made no remonstrances as to the pace they were going at.

Now another individual met the unconscious victim,—seemed to have been waiting for him, from the gestures and slaps on the shoulder they interchanged,—and they turned together into a large warehouse, heartily laughing.

The pursuit slackened.

Daisy, with thanksgiving, subsided from a breathless trot into an exhausted walk; and Fuzzy, composing her features, and

trying to assume an air of innocent unconcern, observed,

“Thank goodness! here is the shop we are going to, at last!”

They followed into the shop after their prey, Daisy feeling exactly as if they were a couple of sleuth-hounds; and, after a few seconds of decent dallying before a stand of elegant, gutta-percha ornaments, turned a counter, and came full upon—Major Hodge!

Mutual astonishment on meeting was expressed by him and Miss Fuzzy, whilst Daisy, standing demurely behind, for the first time recognised in him the object of their hunt. She was not sure whether to be ashamed or amused; especially as the major broadly complimented Fuzzy on her fine complexion, crimsoned by the chase, asking, with a sly look,

“What have you been doing in the

town? I never go out without seeing something of you in the afternoons, but I did not expect to be so lucky at this hour."

"We—we have been doing a little shopping. Goodness! why is Mr. Jones hiding behind the pillar there?"

Pussy's black-eyed swain was indeed trying to secrete himself, as if bashful; but now, on hearing his name, came forward, with an awkward, rumbling laugh, from an adjacent counter.

"I have been helping Major Hodge to buy some articles of—of—dress," he explained.

"Not at all—don't you believe him, Miss Cox. *I* have been helping Mr. Jones to buy some little articles of—of—clothing," mimicked the major, with a great haw-haw.

An amicable skirmish of meaning looks

and inuendoes, as over some excellent private joke, followed.

But Daisy did not hear more, having hurriedly turned away, and begun buying some ribbon that she did not in the least want. Peering shyly round, she could see that the discreet Mr. Jones had also retired to a little distance, leaving the tender couple together.

The major's big, burly figure looked elephantine beside Fuzzy; who was rather slight and tight of outline; and he leered (no other word expresses the feeling his look conveyed to Daisy) down upon Miss Cox's really pretty, fair-haired head, and her cheeks glowing with her late exertions, as if to say, "Come, you *are* rather a nice little creature to be so fond of me. I must give you an extra dance some time for this."

"What coloured ribbon, miss?" asked

the stalwart shopman, whose sinews looked as if they might have been more fitly employed as a defender of his country than in handling a tape measure.

“What colour? Any—I mean, blue,” stammered Daisy; confused by trying hastily to think whether she could combine *any* future usefulness with the present expediency of her purchase. “What length do I want? A yard or two—it doesn’t much matter—whatever you have there. Three and a quarter? Oh, well, that will do quite as well; yes, yes, give it to me, please.”

“You seem delightfully easy to be pleased, Miss Dimity,” said Mr. Jones, close behind, making her start. “Always heard before that ladies got everything down to look at, that was in a shop; and then went off without buying anything.”

At this juncture, Major Hodge and

Fuzzy came up, the former inquiring very particularly of the latter—

“But what do *you* want, Miss Cox? You came in for some shopping; don’t let us detain you. Or would my advice be of any assistance? Ha, ha!”

“I—oh, I don’t want anything here, thank you. I am only waiting till Miss Dimity has finished.”

“Miss Dimity’s shopping does not seem very important! She did not seem to know what she wanted,” Mr. Jones interposed: and he was describing Daisy’s hesitation over her ribbon for the amusement of Major Hodge (and the certain discomfiture of poor Miss Cox), when the little lady drew herself up with dignity.

“You are quite mistaken, Mr. Jones. It is only that I am not very well accustomed to buying things for myself; that is all.”

“Of course, dear, you should have asked my advice; why didn’t I think of it?” cried Fuzzy, warmly and volubly, taking her arm, and saying to the two men, “She always makes me think of a little creature that everyone ought to pet and take care of. Come, I must look after you now. You *have* got what you want——?”

So they went out of the shop, Fuzzy still pressing Daisy’s arm, and exclaiming as they got out of earshot, with real affection—

“You are a darling—I positively declare you are a darling. But, do tell me, what was Mr. Jones buying; did you see? He looked so foolish, and Major Hodge looked so *caught*; I was dying to know.”

“I think it was—stockings,” said Daisy.

“Stockings! Was that all? I was so afraid that they did not want us, it made me quite nervous. I declare! if I had

known that, we might have stayed longer."

Daisy felt devoutly glad, then, that she had not known it; being inwardly convinced of the truth of Miss Cox's first supposition, that they had not been wanted by the gentlemen.

It was a serious reflection, that Mr. Jones now possibly suspected her also of having had ulterior designs in entering the shop. It was almost as bad (yet, no! not nearly—) as the terrible misadventure with Captain Gascoigne. These two events, in two successive days, quite made stains on the sheen and glamour with which little Miss Dimity's imagination had glorified her first visit. She even morbidly thought for five and a half seconds—

"The world is wide; these things are small.

They may be little, but they are all."

But then Fuzzy's evident, intense gratitude, the reflection that she might

have been of more possible use than she quite knew to her eldest young hostess, and her own healthy spirits and conscience helped to restore Daisy's equanimity.

It may be remarked further that Miss Cox subsequently made two dives into shops, perhaps for form's sake, leaving Daisy on the pavement. But each time she returned observing they had not got what she wanted there ; and so went home empty-handed.

CHAPTER X.

“ O wha will shoe my fair foot,
And wha will glove my han’ ?
And wha will lace my middle jimp
Wi’ a new-made London ban’ ?”

THIS was the evening on which they were all to go to the public gardens to hear one of the military bands: the delightful prospect Daisy had so glowingly spoken of to Captain Gascoigne.

She dressed herself in a cool cream costume that seemed meant for such a warm June evening; and, putting on Polly’s hat (the hat of hats lent her to grace this first great visit!) won much applause from everyone when she appeared

in the drawing-room. Especially Mrs. Cox gently called her over to pat and admiringly examine her dress (inwardly resolving to make one for Birdie, after that identical pattern, so soon as their guest had left Marstown).

“She is always so charmingly dressed; as indeed she is charming in all ways,” said the lady to Jack Dimity, who had just come to escort them to the gardens.

To which that young man, well pleased, answered in excellent modern English, after an approving inspection of his sister,

“Well, it *is* rather fetching. Daisy, you look a howling swell to-day. But I have got rather bad news for you all! Our ball is put off.”

Put off! There was a general lengthening of faces, so that the good old expression, their jaws had fallen, would have been literally true.

It appeared that an aged colonel had just died, who had been so intimately connected with "the Strappers" that it seemed in bad taste to dance on the night of his funeral, so the ball would be given a week later instead.

"A week later!"

No one felt sadder than Daisy, who was trying hard *not* to look as if she minded; since she had been only invited to spend a week; and now it was Thursday, and Jack's regiment's ball, that had been fixed for next Tuesday, would only take place on Tuesday week.

"Never mind, my dear, you must stay on with us a little longer, that is all," said Mrs. Cox, kindly, after a quick glance of inquiry at her daughters, who all three warmly seconded the proposal; declaring that the prospect of keeping their guest longer quite atoned for the temporary disappointment.

“It is the best luck that could happen—will bring him here ever so much oftener,” whispered Fuzzy, commending her mother and glancing at young Dimity.

“Yes; I know. But then men *always* run after new girls for a time, and Captain Gascoigne yesterday seemed rather—” murmured the cautious mother, hesitating whether, after all, she had done right.

“Fudge! That woman-hater!” and away marched Miss Cox.

But Pussy paused to warn her mother with feline caution, her interests being at stake.

“Perhaps you are right, mamma, but you must keep your eye on him. Now mind you do, and don’t be forgetting yourself and gossiping with the other old women, and don’t let her out of your sight.”

Mrs. Cox, smothering a sigh, dutifully

prepared to obey, and they went forth in the sunny evening to the gardens.

Crowds of townspeople were streaming out to enjoy themselves after the day's labours; soldiers' red coats brightened the dull streets, going and coming by twos and threes (generally either going to the public houses, or coming out of them). That part of the gardens, however, to which our party was bound, was railed off; and for a small admission price a large result of privacy was obtained. Daisy did not esteem this privilege properly; a crowd was a rarity to her, and a mob an amusing mass of fellow-beings.

The band was in full swing when they arrived; and groups of acquaintances of the Coxes were promenading the gravelled walks that surrounded a grass tennis-ground.

Girls by twos, by threes, even by fours

of a family were warmly greeted by the Coxes, and all gushingly introduced to Miss Dimity as their dearest friends. It seemed to Daisy she had never seen so many girls in her life before ; and all wore dresses buttoned up the back and skimped in material below. She found herself calculating in absence of mind how little it might take to make their frocks, when Jack roused her by saying,

“ Hallo ! ”—

Jack had shown at first an evident determination not to forsake his sister ; and Birdie accordingly evinced equal ardour for her companionship. So these three had strolled together ; while Mrs. Cox, being very tired, sat down on a bench at Jack's bluff instance, and to Birdie's great annoyance, who worshipped the flirtatious maxim, “ Three is no company.”

Fuzzy and Pussy, meeting Major Hodge

and Mr. Jones, became lost to history thenceforth.

“Hallo!” repeated Jack. “Why, here is Captain Gascoigne. I never expected to see *you* at the band,” as his friend in question lounged up, very, very quietly, and greeted the young ladies.

“Well, it was your sister who induced me to come, do you know, by the account she kindly gave me yesterday of the charms of the locality and the merits of the entertainment,” observed Gascoigne, with as quiet a smile.

“You!” muttered Jack, vastly pleased, aside to his sister. “Do you know, that is a great compliment to you, Daisy.”

To her? Daisy could discern no compliment at all in that quiet, sarcastic voice, as she called it to herself. She was inwardly quite furious, and held up her head high. As if she wanted this grave, strict Pharisee

gentleman ; as if he thought her capable of angling for his company ! After yesterday's scene, too !

Precisely !—that had made him think less of her. After which (thinking less of her), his coming to-day partook of the nature of an insult. And how could she like even Jack's friend who could thus curtly insult her, which was an admirable syllogism but for its basis.

A great, valiant resolution in Miss Dimity's throat nearly choked her.

Jack and Birdie Cox had somehow gone on a little in front, under the mistaken idea that Daisy would be charmed with her present companionship. All the past night, and all the bygone morning, she had been telling herself with retrospective shame, then stern resolve--that she must make Captain Gascoigne an EXPLANATION.

Now or never !

They took three paces in silence, then she began, in a meek, small voice,

“Captain Gascoigne—I thought” (long break of agony; forced renewal), “I—I thought, Captain Gascoigne.”

“Yes?” interrogated Gascoigne; and then, seeing how she hesitated, and that, though he waited, no more words seemed coming, he went on in good-humoured banter, by way of encouragement, “You say you thought, Miss Dimity. It is a very good thing to do, believe me. Most young ladies, I am told, don’t think, either before speaking or acting. Many men (like myself) are not capable of much thought. You thought——?”

“I *was thinking*——”

Horrible pause. A young person becoming a very red-tipped Daisy; a droop-

ing-headed Daisy; uttering at last, with another gasp—

“Please, I was thinking yesterday——”

And there she stuck fast. Not another word, though her hearer waited patiently.

He looked down upon her and saw, with surprise, that she was in real distress of mind; why, he could not imagine. But he, good-naturedly, turned to the landscape of the tennis-ground, observing, in a musing manner,

“You bring to my memory the last song in the Ingoldsby Legends, the one I liked best, though it is sad. It begins—

‘As I lay a-thynkyng, a-thynkyng, a-thynkyng,
Merrie sang the Birde as she sat upon the spraye.’

“Are you fond of poetry? Of course you like the moderns, like all young ladies. Now I am old-fashioned enough to like Chaucer and Milton better.”

It was of no use that he so tried to give Daisy time to recover. She was only the more overpowered by this fresh evidence of Captain Gascoigne's awful unapproachableness. She could hardly quote any poetry, except a few "elegant extracts" that had been hammered into her brain in schoolroom days, for she had a very bad memory. But she remembered, now, hearing Jack say that his friend was a deeply read man (in Master Jack's opinion).

Just now, when there was still time to speak, Mrs. Cox approached them, addressing Gascoigne by name.

She begged him to give her full particulars about the unfortunate death of his lamented whilom colonel, over whom she sweetly sighed. It made not the slightest difference to her regret that she had not known the deceased in the smallest degree; nor that Gascoigne assured her it was no

very unexpected event, the veteran having been ninety-three years old. Mrs. Cox still softly persisted in sorrowing ; and contrived cleverly to keep Gascoigne on her one side and Daisy on the other, while caressing the latter's arm with little, affectionate pats.

After awhile Daisy grew nervous, being unaccustomed to the patting process, and not knowing whether any response was expected ; so she hailed with delight Mr. Lee's smiling face suddenly appearing beside her.

“ Ah ! Miss Dimity, *how* are you ? ” he cried, with a most flattering emphasis. “ Very well ? That's right ! And where is that old ruffian, your brother ? What, deserted you for anyone else ! Horrible bad taste ! Let me tell you what ; if *I* had such a sister—— ”

This impressive remark was uttered in

a mock whisper, a look supplying the end of the sentence; after which Mr. Lee gazed a moment at the sky—suppressing a laugh at his own humbug—till, Daisy laughing outright, he at once joined her, delighted with himself.

“But, now, may I introduce a great friend of mine? He is Captain O’Donoghue, of the 170th; *the* handsomest man in the British Army. May I?” he inquired, in such a tone as if asking an immense favour; and again whispering Captain O’Donoghue’s attributes, as if the secret was to go no further.

Daisy felt immensely pleased, and, looking round, saw a gentleman admiring the scenery while awaiting his introduction.

This was a decidedly well-looking man; with hair not uncaressed by curling-tongs, and an elaborately-drooped moustache; both of that yellow hue which disguised

almost the fact that he was turning very grey. Daisy thought with doubting admiration that he had the smallest waist, stiffest back, and broadest chest of anyone she had almost ever seen. In dress both he and Mr. Lee seemed just turned out of a bandbox, fresh from the tailor's admiring hand. Only the little Smiler was dark and dapper, neat and waxed to the last degree; whilst his friend was, as Daisy described it to herself, "fair, tall, and altogether wavy."

They made a capital foil to each other; and they knew it; being seldom far apart, and generally indeed, as they expressed it, "hunting in couples."

The "handsomest man in the British Army" seemed inclined to patronise little Miss Dimity in a most kindly manner; smiling upon her artless replies to his various queries delivered as thus, whilst con-

tinually caressing his moustache, and likewise leaning for support upon his cane with one arm akimbo—showing the elegance of his waist :

“Haw, Miss—er—Dimity. What do you think of—er—Marstown? Like it, aw? Really—?” (pulling his moustache with an air of surprise; that being the first expression occurring to him). “Sorry this ball is put off, eh?” (tenderly rearranging his moustache, to console it for its late ill-treatment). “What, *nevaw* been at a ball before! Oh, come, Lee; I say—eh, Smiler, what do *you* say—eh? Come! that will be something quite fresh, then; delightfully novel, ’pon my word.” (This sentence left Miss Dimity wondering whether she was to be the delightful novelty to him, or the ball to her.)

“Come, I will tell you what it is—er,” went on the willowy warrior, suddenly

speaking with a momentary animation. "We—er—that is to say, some of our fellows and myself—have been thinking, don't you know, of—ah! giving a small dance next week, to make up for the disappointment of all you young ladies. You'll come, eh?—won't you?"

"Oh, thank you!" cried Daisy, overjoyed. "And how pleased Mrs. Cox and her daughters will be to go, too. They were quite as much vexed as I was about Jack's—about the ball, I mean, being put off."

A quick look passed between Captain O'Donoghue and Mr. Lee.

"Mrs. Cox. Oh! aw, yes! of course. You are staying with her. Yes, er—pray tell them, too, how delighted I shall be to see them also, Miss—er—Dimity. Tuesday next. You won't mind not getting a card, eh? We want to keep it so very

small. . . . But you'll be *sure* to come, won't you?"

And, with a dulcet smile and bland bow, the gentle knight moved away to give joy to the hearts of some few others of the fair sex that were doubtless, he felt, already beginning to suffer jealous pangs.

"I say! What an impression you have been and gone and made, Miss Dimity! *Veni! vidi! vici!* Ho, ho, ho! Excuse my laughing, *won't* you? You know old Dimity and I are such friends," exclaimed the Smiler, with a gaiety as if he was longing to execute a mirthful break-down, and that only respect for Daisy restrained his joyous effervescence. Then, in a suddenly solemn whisper—

"Do you know that O'Donoghue has so many girls most desperately gone about him; and they'll all be terribly cut-out when they find he has asked you. And

this is to be such a small dance, that he must have given you all his cards, as they are each only asking five or six guests."

"But did he not mean to ask the Coxes, too?" asked Daisy, distressed. "How could I go otherwise? I did not know what else he could mean. I cannot go without my chaperon."

"Quite right, quite right," said young Lee, most consolingly. "Of course you would not; but, mind you, lots of the Marstown girls would—I mean they would have accepted, and run chance for a chaperon, or have got some lady who was, by way of looking after ten or twelve others, to take them, too. But with you it is a different thing, certainly. And old O'Donoghue was delighted, I could see. Oh, excuse me for chaffing you, won't you?—but you are an Irresistible One."

"Oh, please, I must go back to Mrs.

Cox at once," exclaimed Daisy, in a hurry, seeing that lady making small, fluttering signals to them.

She was, as it were, clucking like an elegant hen anxious to gather the stranger chicken under her wing; but not taking any heed of her own stray brood.

At a little distance, Gascoigne now stood utterly alone among the crowd; having successfully contrived to retire with politeness, after acting chorus to Mrs. Cox's "Dead March" over the late, lamented, unknown colonel, as uttered, *con grazio e spirito*, by that lady.

Now, seeing his friends, Lee and Jack Dimity, approaching, he too slowly returned; and Daisy by-and-by found him near her side.

"Well, Miss Dimity, do you find this amuses you as much as you thought?" he asked, with a quiet air that approached

boredom, in one of the softer intervals between the crashes of the brass band, playing "The Turkish Patrol."

She, who had been listening in an ecstasy of pleasure, turned round vexed. All the pleasure went out of her at sight of this *bête noire*, who kept silently recalling the most embarrassing and annoying incident, almost, of her whole life.

"I am enjoying myself very much ; very much indeed, thank you." (Trying not to let her voice seem too severe in disapprobation of himself.) "But you seem not to care to hear such good music ; nor to see all these people, though, I suppose, they are your friends. I wonder you came at all."

"I have hardly any friends, or at least very few friends in Marstown, Miss Dimity. And as to coming—remember, you advised me to come," with a deprecating smile,

that however might have been thought gently sarcastic, if anyone not versed in human expression chose to think so.

Daisy chose to think so; she was utterly aggravated. Why, oh! why should Jack's dearest friend, who seemed at first so nice—why should he seem always fated to make her look foolish; resolved to misinterpret her?

“I—I—I never for a moment asked you to come. You must not think that,” she responded, with anger-gleaming eyes, drawing up her plump little person with intense dignity.

“Miss Dimity, I never for a moment supposed you had. I said ‘*advised*’ me.”

Thus ended the conversation between this jarring young man and maiden, for at that moment they were interrupted by the Smeeth family.

CHAPTER XI.

COST—"In manner and form following, sir, all those three: I was seen with her in the manor-house, sitting with her upon the form, and taken following her into the park

KING—*The time when? About the sixth hour; when beasts most graze, birds best peck, and men sit down to that nourishment which is called supper."*

THE Smeeth family, father, mother, and daughters, having caught sight of Gascoigne (and secondarily of Daisy, who was considered a distinguished stranger), bore down upon the prey.

First came the mother; an honest, broad-faced soul, but quite unwieldy from stoutness; one of those good feather bed mothers one often sees panting in black bombazeen

attire. Then the two young ladies; with several satellites in the persons of Martown young men, employed in attorneys' or other offices. These the Miss Smeeths clearly only kept in tow till Gascoigne, young Dimity, or Lee should be lured, or might deign to take their places.

Behind, marshalling all, came Smeeth father; thickset, snowy-haired, and moustachioed; with the gash of an old wound still scarring his cheek. He was, however, not a bad specimen of an old soldier, thought Daisy, as her acquaintances, rushing up eagerly, shook hands, and asked leave (with a filial deference that really did them credit) to introduce her to their father and mother.

Colonel Smeeth's bow was of the nature of a paternally-meant military salute. Mrs. Smeeth, however, stretching out her fat hands, imprisoned one of Daisy's in a warm,

prolonged clasp, while softly wheezing before she spoke.

“Deary me! So this is Mr. Dimity’s sister; how very nice!” she observed, as if speaking from above her treble chin with difficulty. “Well, now, I must tell you, my dear, as, indeed, I was sayin’ to himself the other day, although, indeed, I am afraid he didn’t quite understand me, on account of Mrs. Cox calling him away before I had got to the end of what I was explainin’. (A most elegant woman, my dear, and bein’ a cousin of yours besides, not that I wish to say a thing against her for a moment, for her fly was at the door, and she offered him a seat, and called out she couldn’t wait; although indeed I thought she might, the horse being not at all fresh, and me in the midst of talk with your good brother, who didn’t seem since either to understand——”)

Certainly, poor Daisy did not feel either that she in the least understood. But Mrs. Smeeth, pausing to take another long, long wheeze, her eldest daughter came to the rescue ; being well used to the task of making her parent's rambling discourses intelligible to the public.

“My mother means that, if we had known in time that Mr. Dimity wanted to get you put up for this ball, we should have been just as glad as the Coxes to give you a shakedown and house-room too—only we didn't know.”

While thanking for this proffered hospitality, its recipient inwardly wondered.

But, now, Gascoigne created a diversion of topic by civilly making himself in turn apparent to Mrs. Smeeth, as she gazed at the world over her three chins.

“Ah, captain, deary me ! How-de-doo ?” she cried, with a start of slow surprise ; and then retaining his hand likewise,

looked inquiringly at her daughters; "Have you asked the captain for our little party, girls?"

"No, for I didn't think he'd care to come. I've never seen him at muffin-worries," said Easy, in a loud tone, of which the decision could not be doubted, adding, "Would you——? It's only a tea-fight we are having after this music is over."

"Now, deary me, Essie, that's not the way to ask him" (with a reproachful, heaving sigh). "Many young men now-a-days, as they've often and often told me, would far prefer a friendly mutton-cup and chop of tea—bless, me! I mean the other way—to sittin' night after night at a grand, dull mess-dinner. Now, what do you say, Captain Gascoigne?"

Poor Gascoigne's face looked so politely dismal at thoughts of the mutton-chop and cup of tea that Daisy, who had begun

to study her accuser's expression, could hardly forbear smiling.

He murmured,

"I am afraid, Mrs. Smeeth, I am such a creature of habit! I hope you will forgive me for not coming to your tea, but really I so seldom go anywhere——"

"I know, I know; you like your dinner. Deary me! you are all sad young men; no domestic tastes; never out of your clubs. Not meaning you, Captain Gascoigne—for I do say to your face, as behind your back, (ask my girls!) that of all the officers that have been quartered here this many a day, there have been few so civil to an old woman like me, and always quite the gentleman (ask my girls now!). And what I wanted to say is—if you do change your mind and come in, don't be thinkin' about your clothes now" (with another wheeze). "We never mind about dress at my little

parties, never; we're quite *au naturel*!!"

For all his politeness, Gascoigne stood transfixed. Then he met Daisy's eye, who at that could contain herself no longer, turning to hide her mirth by seeming to admire the foliage of a *laurustinus*.

"Are you a *connoisseur* in plants, as well as a good French scholar, Miss Dimity?" said Gascoigne, presently, in her ear.

Daisy, starting, saw by the laugh in the speaker's eyes, and a twitching of his moustache, that on one point at least they were in unison.

"Know flowers! Miss Dimity knows them so well, she calls them all by their Christian names," struck in Smiler Lee, who had followed them; evidently considering Daisy his especial property for the day, and therefore allowing himself to interrupt them.

In turn, Easy Smeeth followed Mr. Lee

to the much-sought laurustinus bushes, when she surprised them all by a sudden, violent, though suppressed giggle.

“Look here, through this,” she energetically whispered to them, while separating the branches. “Look quick, all of you!”

They all peeped through the hole she made, and saw Mr. Jones and Miss Pussie Cox on a bench hidden behind the bushes. They were seated with their backs to the spectators, apparently imagining, ostrich-like, that because not seeing they were unseen. Pussie’s back hair swept (in one chignon and two ringlets) over the back of the bench; her eyes were softly upturned to Mr. Jones’s inanimate black ones. The young man’s expression, generally bovine, now looked sheepish; perhaps because Pussie’s head was very, *very* near reclining on his shoulder; and he apparently did not

know how to behave under the trying circumstances, his mind being full of solemn warnings from Major Hodge, his Mentor.

“Come away ! I think it is very wrong—I mean, *is* it quite right of us to be peeping?” uttered Daisy, hotly.

Most of the others chaffed and giggled. But Gascoigne said,

“Miss Dimity is right. We had no right to look.” He said this so simply nobody took offence. It was his general way to include himself among the offenders, when quietly putting in a word against anything unkind said or done by people.

“Come here, then, Miss Dimity, if you won’t peep behind bushes ! Come round this walk behind here. There can be no harm in our doing that, surely !” cried Easy Smeeth, rather jeeringly.

The grounds, like most squares, had a

few bushes at each corner, and a circumscribing gravel walk. It was to the bushes at the opposite corner she now led the unsuspecting party, along the walk. Just at the corner, therefore, somewhat screened by more laurustinus, was another bench—but *it* had not been removed into hiding—and on it (more in the open than Pussy, according to her character) sat poor Fuzzy Cox and Major Hodge!

Her tight, neat hair-plaits, too, were near the Major's shoulder; but this seemed more his fault, or owing to his size. Her eyes looked up into those of her companion; but differently, since with real sadness. And his returned her glance with a false sweetness—a honeyed gaze of flirtation, as it seemed, even to the most unsophisticated of the lookers-on. Major Hodge was not very like a spider; unless it were a stout, handsome spider, unknown to British

housemaids ; yet to Daisy's eyes her friend, for she already really liked Fuzzy Cox, made her think of a poor, pretty fly she longed to frighten away. As their party passed these two, with real or affected demureness, Daisy, whose feelings of partisanship for her sex were ruffled, looked suspiciously round at some of the rest ; and caught—she could hardly have believed her eyes !—Major Hodge giving a positive wink at Smiler Lee.

She was so thunderstruck at such conduct that when Easy Smeeth asked her, with a significant laugh, what she thought of the gentleman on the bench, she answered, in a hurry, with a little, disapproving shake of her head,

“ I don't like him at all. I don't think he is a nice sort of man.”

“ Hullo, Daisy, what has come over you ? I never heard you speak a bad word of any

living soul before. Hodge is a very good fellow ; and, besides, what do you know of men ? There are not many round Elm Hall," cried Jack.

"Are you not rather too outspoken, Miss Dimity. You have no idea how people repeat such observations," whispered Gascoigne, in a kindly tone ; giving the warning to his friend's young sister in a way that even her readiness to take offence with him could not resent.

"You are quite right, indeed ; and, as Jack says, perhaps I don't know what I am talking about," she humbly answered. "Very likely, Major Hodge is a very good man, if one only knew him better."

"They say second thoughts are best ; on the other hand, first impressions are often truest," was all Gascoigne's reply, as private as his warning.

"Major Hodge is an awful old flirt, I

think ; but no end of a friend of mine since this morning. Let me tell you all—no ! not now ! it will be better fun after tea to see your friends', the Coxes', faces," struck in Easy, oracularly, with a loud laugh. "D'ye know his nickname ; given him because he is so fat ? Hodge-podge ! isn't it fine ! He can't stand it, you know ; likes to be called the Handsome Hodge, as some girl who was dreadfully in love with him once called him. I'll have to call him that to-night."

Call him that—! Little Miss Dimity felt quite dismayed ; then wondered, was she too prudish ; and wondered again what sort of society was this that Jack seemed so much at home in. The rest of the gentlemen, somehow, seemed rather uninterested, while Miss Smeeth thus discoursed of their fellow-man.

"There are the Miss Silverthornes,"

observed Gascoigne, pointing out two old ladies, dressed daintily and precisely alike.

They had snow-white hair; and wore silver-grey dresses; little bonnets and mantillas trimmed with fine old black lace. The handsome lace may have been a little out of place, seeing their gowns were of a cheap material. And yet it was an evidence of gentility, like a carved coat-of-arms over a moss-covered gateway.

“*Aren't* they two old cats?” cried Easy.

“How charming they look! I should like to know them so much,” Daisy exclaimed at the same moment.

“I should like very much to make you both acquainted. Could it be managed to-day, I wonder?” answered Gascoigne, speaking to Daisy only; and in his slow, courteous way he moved a little towards the old ladies, preparing to raise his hat. But no doubt he was too slow, for they

both passed by without recognising him; being, apparently, gently meditating on the after-glow of the sunset sky.

Gascoigne put his glass in his eye, being short-sighted like half the world, and looked at them unavailingly; while Easy jeeringly tittered.

“They did not see me. It cannot be done to-day, but I will try another time,” he calmly said, returning to Daisy; and then, taking his leave of her first, added aside—“There was something you wished to say to me; could you not tell me now? Is it anything I can do for you? You said that, since yesterday you had been thinking——”

“No, no. I can’t say it—at least, not now,” uttered Daisy, in fresh confusion, getting red again at once.

Gascoigne bowed, and gravely departed.

“How do you like him? Tell me, dear,”

asked Miss Easy, in luring tones ; lovingly linking her arm in Daisy's ; while shrewdly observing the colour in the latter's cheeks.

“Not much,” pettishly said that foolish, small person who, five minutes ago, but for his last question, might have answered differently. She glanced round to make sure Jack was not near. “He rather frightens me, I don't know why ; and he has a way of making me feel as if I had done wrong things when I've not, that—that I can't explain.” (The Army List in the work-box ; indeed, no !)

“He is a prig, child ; that's it. Oh, yes ; I liked him yesterday, because he was kind, but to-day he goes and spoils all that by being too stiff to come to our little spread. He is, certainly, too fine a gentleman for me.”

CHAPTER XII.

"The man that hails you Tom and Jack,
 And proves by thumps upon your back
 How he esteems your merit,
 Is such a friend that one had need
 Be very much his friend indeed
 To pardon or to bear it."

"WE'LL have high jinks at tea," said
 the two Miss Smeeths, heralding
 the party into their house. It was a
 larger house than that of the Coxes ; but
 very dingy and close-smelling, and so dark
 that, the men being awkward, all stumbled
 on an unsuspected step at the corner of
 the stairs.

"What on earth do you keep this man-

trap here for, Miss Smeeth?" growled Jack.

"I've nearly broken my nose," added the Smiler, with rueful gaiety, having pitched head foremost against the wall. "It wouldn't matter for you, Dimity, you know; but with me it is really more serious."

The mirth that ensued over Jack's expression at his imputed ugliness was only diverted when he asked, "Well, Miss Grace, how is the clock to-day? I never come here that some of you ladies are not changing it." Instantly Grace Smeeth jumped up, and began sily putting back the hands of the clock on the drawing-room mantelpiece.

"We were too long listening to the band; but it was all your faults, so you must all hold your tongues, and father will never know," she explained.

Amid a fresh roar of laughter, a cracked tea-bell rang violently downstairs, and the colonel, attired in a militia mess-jacket, entered the room and glanced at the clock.

“To the minute!” he uttered, approvingly. “Military punctuality, gentlemen! Ah, that’s the way I bring up my girls, you see ; it makes everyone of them fit to be soldiers’ wives.”

“Papa’s an old fool,” muttered Easy, aside, with her usual elegant freedom ; that, however, as everybody could see, was compatible with much rough and ready affection for the said old fool.

“I’ll tell him about the clock—I’ll tell—” threatened Major Hodge in a loud whisper, whereupon ensued playful hustling of him by Miss Grace, with much pretended alarm, whilst he made many mock-audible ejaculations of “Colonel—I’ll tell you—What’s the right time,” etc.

“Tea, tea. It will be cold! so come, please, ladies and gents,” said the colonel, with an anxious air of punctuality, offering his arm to Daisy.

“But Mrs. Cox——” timidly observed the latter, glancing round, and for the first time perceiving that lady’s absence.

“Mamma! Oh, we told her she might go home and look after papa’s supper to-night, for we are quite able to take care of ourselves home,” Fuzzy loudly explained. “Or else your brother can chaperon you, and you two can chaperon all the rest.”

“Wait a bit, Miss Dimity. Take off your hat, won’t you?” cried one of the Smeeths, diving at our heroine; for she was quite bewildered.

And then all stumbled downstairs again, past the unlucky step, with unwashed hands, somewhat to Daisy’s secret dismay. For, though her own little fingers were

spotlessly white, no one could help noticing that the colonel, who sat at the foot of the table beside her, wore his nails in deep mourning.

The room, though fairly large, was dingy in the extreme ; the wall-paper, of a green tadpole pattern, on buff ground, was grimy ; the paint cracked ; the bell-rope broken ; the table-cloth bore rather unaccountable creases, and a spot or two suggesting (as was indeed true) that it had done duty at one great tea-party before, and had then been put by to grace once more this one. But nothing else could distract poor Daisy's big eyes from wandering, with a horrible fascination, always back to the colonel's unpharisaical hands. And he had begun cutting the big loaf, too !

At last, as if from some electric communication of thought, Smiler Lee, who

sat on Daisy's other side, also remarked what was amiss.

"Nasty, isn't it?" he murmured, sympathetically, in Daisy's ear.

He seemed to consider it a breach of attention on his part that day, if he disregarded her for a moment. Then, always disposed to be merry, and have for his motto, "Laugh while you can,"—

"But never mind, this is not one of the 'hupper succles' of Marstown society, as you will soon find, Miss Dimity. Good old fellow in his way; but what can you expect?—he was only a ranker."

"A what?"

"A private in the army; got on to be sergeant; and was sent then to drill a militia regiment, in which, after trying for a lifetime, he must have taught them something, for he became an officer."

"But I honour him for that," Daisy

murmured back earnestly ; being very reverent of the claims to respect of those who rose by honest labour—like her grandfather.

“ Still it was *only* a militia regiment,” gloomily objected the Smiler. “ Look at him now in that dirty old uniform, sitting beside you. He’s never out of it ; and it’s never clean. Now *we* never like to go among ladies unless we have changed to mufti.”

“ Yes, I know. Of course, that is a very nice feeling.”

Miss Dimity did not like to add that she had a secret weakness for uniform. Not the blue postman-like garb ; but real red uniform, helmet, sword, and all ; and, whenever it was possible, cocked hat and feathers.

It was so becoming ! but Jack having once laughed uproariously at this feminine

reason, she delicately suppressed her opinion.

The meal was going on in serious earnest. There were the promised mutton chops, cut nobly big, but rather rich as to gravy, as one of the young ladies expressed it; cold pork, and some uncanny-looking salad, at which Mrs. Cox, good housewife, would have shivered. Also, to crown the feast, a pair of skinny fowls, which Mrs. Smeeth was hospitably inviting everyone to partake of.

“Now you’ll *all* have some chicken.”

“A manifest impossibility,” muttered Jack Dimity to Birdie, who instantly gave a little shriek of mirth, that dismayed the young man; for, though fond of a mock-growl, Jack was a gentleman. But there was plenty of bread; plenty of marmalade and treacle; plenty of tea, to Major Hodge’s comparative comfort, who remarked across the table to Daisy,

“I’m a regular whale at tea; are you? Beg pardon, I mean don’t you like it? *Did* you ask me to have another cup, ma’am?” to Mrs. Smeeth. “Well, since you *are* so pressing, I think I will have a second one, ha! ha!”

“Your fourth, you mean,” cried Easy. “Mother, you may put another spoonful in the pot; for last time Major Hodge took seven big cups to *his own cheek!*”

The amount of slang talked surprised Daisy; who, brought up among green pastures in old-fashioned ways (and the Tribe of Gad not yet old enough to go to school), now felt herself to seem a purist, if not pedantic in speech.

The fun grew fast and furious among the young people. The jokes and talk were however all concerning other Marstown folk; mostly other rival young ladies; and whether the attentions of their soldier

swains were or were not slackening. Daisy soon found she was not attended to when, by putting in a modest question or two, she tried to take a share in the conversation.

Mrs. Smeeth, looming large at the far end of the table, cared for nothing beyond her own eating and drinking ; except the teacups of the rest.

But the colonel tried his best to take part in his guests' and daughters' jokes, with an energy worthy of a better cause. For, being a little deaf, he would sit with one hand raised to his ear, as if making a new kind of stiff military salute ; and would very likely shout out loudly, in his bluff, honest tones,

“Ha ! ha ! very good indeed, Lee,” or
“Dimity,” at the wrong part of the story.

It seemed to Daisy that the young men did not quite like the familiar way in which the poor colonel used their names without

prefix ; as if wishing to assure himself by the sound that he was their equal. They themselves always answered him as “Colonel Smeeth,” with some coolness in their deference. Indeed, Major Hodge, in a cavalier way, almost ignored his existence. At last the latter (doubtless annoyed that the good man of the house was constantly, strenuously inquiring what they were all talking about) began a story, which he assured the colonel was capital ; and which he accordingly directed full into his good ear.

It was of an old lady—his aunt, as he lightly averred—who, being very deaf, never went out to a dinner-party without her ear-trumpet. Unfortunately, it once happened that when a *very* young footman came round to her with soup and asked, “White or ox-tail, ma’am?” she, being very absent-minded and busy talking,

popped up her trumpet to hear what he was saying ; upon which, ha, ha, ha ! he, thinking it was a funnel, poured the soup down it !

“ First-rate that—eh ? Wasn’t it, colonel ? ” asked Major Hodge, with a sly twinkle in his eye, and a great chuckle.

But the colonel did not seem to see it. He laughed indeed, but his face got red and he mopped it a good deal ; and Daisy saw he was so much disconcerted that he retired gradually from the general *mêlée*.

Pitying him for this, and also (being very soft-hearted) for the mild contempt his vulgarities brought upon him from his other guests, she kindly tried to draw him into conversation with herself.

The colonel seemed a little morose at first ; but, gradually unthawing, began to explain to her the niceties of *drill* ; on which subject he accidentally discovered

her amazing ignorance. By-and-by, he was so engrossed with the subject that he would not allow her attention to waver a second to the Smiler, who still tried occasionally to engage it.

A fresh little amusement had now been introduced at table.

Just as Lee was about raising to his lips an especially delicious morsel of buttered hot-cake topped with marmalade, Miss Grace Smeeth, who was on his farther side, whipped the dainty from him smartly and ate it. Instantly Major Hodge, who was beyond herself, pounced on the most appetising crust on her plate: and so in turn everyone began appropriating his or her neighbour's food. It was high jinks! as the young ladies had prophesied.

Only the father, and mother, and Daisy were spared, the last as being under the host's immediate protection; on the whole,

she was not sorry, then, at being so monopolized by the old soldier ; although before she had felt it was hard to be so held fast during almost the whole time of the long meal—while Mr. Lee was casting such mock-sorrowful glances too.

CHAPTER XIII.

BEAT—"You had musty victual, and he hath help to eat it: he is a very valiant trencher-man, he hath an excellent stomach."

MESS—"And a good soldier too, lady."

BEAT—"And a good soldier to a lady."

WELL! the highest of high teas and high jinks, too, must come to an end; and this one slowly ended when Major Hodge had had his seventh well-sweetened cup of tea.

The ladies adjourned to the drawing-room. After a storm followed calm; and while some of the gentlemen smoked a cigar below, the others were detained by the colonel to talk "shop," somewhat to

their disgust—since, after all, he had only been most of his life in a far from smart militia regiment.

Meanwhile, Daisy had leisure to observe this second specimen of a Marstown drawing-room:—of a room in which her friends' dearest friends would be naturally supposed to show evidences of their pursuits, good taste and fancy; since it was both their best apartment and also the one they really lived in.

It seemed to have sufficient size and height. But here also, as in the dining-room, the general effect was dingy; while all the old, worn chairs were smothered with coarse crochet-work antimacassars, or gaudy, soiled woollen ones, like old wives' shoulders going to market.

Daisy shuddered with the fine feelings of a latter-day, dainty embroidress. *She* only pardoned "chair-backs," as she called

them, when worked in crewel wools or silks in high art shades, according to the latest School of Art designs; so the little woollen shawls made her feel dolorous.

As to the rest of the room, the walls had once been papered in white, with a chaste pattern (as the present advertisements say) of grey nothing-in-particular running all over it; but the white ground had turned grey, too, not to say grimy, from dust, and the pattern had become somewhat merged. Daisy, looking at it, longed to set a stout-armed country wench or two to rub the walls properly clean; to take down the faded green curtains, with their baldequin valance at the top, of which the folds were plainly choke-full of dust. Gracious! what a "stour" she would raise!

Then, oh! for an hour of a housemaid's broom and tea-leaves on this frayed carpet; and open-air shaking to the heavy covers

of the two bulky old tables, on one of which covers the young ladies of the family plainly wiped their pens after writing; while the other bore the marks of the colonel and Mrs. Smeeth's less frequent caligraphy, but more frequent libations of tea and oblations of crumbs to the household lares.

The marble chimney-piece was grey; and of a spotty nature, distantly recalling brawn.

Its adornments consisted in, first:—an elegant group of three white nymphs all a-tiptoe, carefully shaded by a bell-glass, seldom dusted. On either hand a candlestick, from which depended what the Tribe of Gad called glass jingles. Further, under another glass, a wax, Spanish matador, guarding one corner; visibly decrepit between time and heat, in spite of the glass case which kept about his feet several bits

of his person or garments; (these it was apparently to be hoped that he himself would pick up in time, since no one else seemed likely to do so). A gipsy, smiling lightly over her similar misfortunes, graced the other corner.

Besides, there were several brackets, wearing petticoats of soiled Berlin worsted-work, and carefully upholding, for some mysterious reason, objects of very mean value. Berlin-wool cushions, too, displaying hideous roses on green ground-work, lay around; with little ends of feathers stealing out of the stuffing.

As to books, a bundle of the *Family Herald* lay certainly on one of the big tables. Likewise, a good many broken-backed, yellow railway-novels were also there, mixed indiscriminately with Mrs. Smeeth's half-knitted coarse socks for the colonel, the *Army and Navy Gazette*, and

Broad Arrow (likewise the colonel's property). Lastly, *Myra's Journals*, dogs'-eared at those pages where recommendations are given for removing sunburn, or imparting golden tints to the locks ; and again where kindly answers from the editorial office told G. or E. S. (Grace or Esther Smeeth) how their new Jersey bodices should be trimmed, and their old skirts, in reply to anxious queries, made to suit the former.

Add to all this a general flavour of closed windows, and meal-time whiffs from the kitchen ; that was the Smeeth's drawing-room.

So soon as the gentlemen entered, a general movement of joy took place among the young ladies.

The colonel and his wife, like a couple of good old cronies, at once retired to the back drawing-room ; installing themselves

there in two big arm-chairs—one to knit, the other to slumber. Grace Smeeth sat down to the old cracked piano, and began playing a waltz (the only music she knew), and dancing seemed imminent, when the colonel called out, in good-humoured grumbling,

“Eh, eh, girls! Could you not leave us a few minutes in peace, till I get my snooze?”

“Yes, yes; let him have his sleep,” cried all the gentlemen, with rather suspicious alacrity, eyeing the carpet, and Essie, who was sharp enough to divine their real wishes, proposed—

“Well then, if we are not to dance, we must have games.”

This was agreed to, and the games began.

At first, they consisted in playing proverbs, “earth, air, fire, and water,”

“throwing up lights,” or such-like harmless amusements, in which Daisy joined with much relish. But, by-and-by, their character became romping, and “hide and go seek”—“hiding by twos and twos”—as was distinctly insisted on by Major Hodge, was proposed and carried with loud applause.

They drew lots which couple should go out first. Then, with some tremors, Daisy found that she and Mr. Lee were to be the first to leave the lights and society of the drawing-room for the general gloom that prevailed through the rest of the house. Once outside the door, the darkness looked so dark that she disliked even more the idea, to the Smiler’s wonder; till he good-naturedly hit on a plan to please her, yet fulfil the game. This was to softly open the back drawing-room-door, and the instant the hue and cry was given, to slip in

by this one, while the rest were bound to emerge from the other door. It was a simple idea, but succeeded admirably.

Noiselessly they crept in, behind the backs of the unsuspecting host and hostess; and sat down unseen in the next room most comfortably to chat, whilst distant noises showed the chase was being pursued from cellar to garret.

“How unkind it was of you to flirt at tea-time with the old colonel! I had never a chance of getting a word in. Oh, you are—excuse me for laughing at you, Miss Dimity, but you *are* an irresistible one!” began the Smiler, whose attentions to Daisy had been indeed unremitting, so far as in him lay; but who never seemed to be serious enough to be taken *au sérieux* by anyone.

Miss Dimity returned that it had been a simple act of charity and due courtesy on

her part ; for which, she was sure, the poor man was grateful.

“ So he *ought* to have been,” said the Smiler, emphatically, “ but ” (with a sigh) “ I don’t believe the old gentleman could appreciate it.”

At this moment they heard the colonel waking up in the back drawing-room.

“ Well, Mary Ann, that’s a nice-looking little girl that was beside me at tea, young Dimity’s sister.”

Start of both the listeners. A little bridling air of “ I told you so,” on Daisy’s part ; and a deferential nod, implying “ Always right—enchanted princess,” from the Smiler.

“ But she’s not a patch on either of our girls,” continued the proud parent, disburdening his heart, in fond confidence that they two were alone. “ Why, our ones were having all the fun with the

young men, and kept them going all the time—didn't they now? None of the young fellows looked at her, so I had to talk to her myself. Not but that I generally like to be in the fun that's going with the rest; but I didn't like her to seem out in the cold, you know; or to feel cut out too much, eh?"

"No, Smeeth; of course. Quite right, my dear," replied Mrs. Smeeth, who seemed to have taken up the slumberous tendencies her lord had just dropped; adding, with a gleam of liveliness, "Ah! there's not many can hold a candle to our girls."

Fresh interchange of looks between the listeners! But now it was quite an amazed, almost indignant flash from Daisy's big blue eyes. The Smiler, on the contrary, noiselessly lifted his knees to his chin, and rocked himself in an ecstasy of ungenerous mirth. Then he stuffed all but one little

corner of a superfine silk handkerchief into his mouth, to stifle the outbursts of his laughter, only withdrawing it to murmur weakly at last—

“ Oh ! do excuse me ; but if you could see your own face ! You look exactly like a good-natured baby disgusted with the world, and trying ever so hard to get into a temper ; but you can’t manage it—he, he, he ! ”

When the rest came back and discovered them, fresh emissaries were despatched into the household darkness. But as these happened at times to be Major Hodge, or Mr. Jones, with either of the Smeeths, it became plain that the Miss Coxes’s feelings were liable to be stirred up, if not outraged. Certainly, all had equal chances of subsequent meetings in darksome encounters round corners ; breathless scurries down passages and stairs ; jostlings, scufflings,

efforts to be caught and to escape.

It was to be hoped they liked it ; certainly one person did not, and that was Daisy.

Her terror lest Mr. Jones or Major Hodge might spring out from some horrible curtain and catch *her* round the waist ! (as she had seen done to the others) was all the greater that she perceived it would be thought ludicrous. So she crept so timidly behind all the others that Jack observed it : and said, with a sort of self-accusing approval of her shyness, and dubious encouragement,

“What a frightened little mouse you are ! Keep close to me all the time, and no one shall hurt you.”

One curious fact was that, during these high revels, two thoughts, actually about Captain Gascoigne—and those contradictory ones—came into Daisy’s mind.

The one was devout thanksgiving that he had refused that little party: for she would have been deadly ashamed for him to have seen her engaged in such romps.

The other was regret that, after all, he had not come; for she felt sure, in his presence, no one could have misbehaved very much. He had such an indescribable way of making *her* feel as if he thought so highly of womankind, that she half-unconsciously strained herself to meet his expectations.

At last, flushed and panting, the whole crew returned to the drawing-room, and flung themselves to rest in more or less graceful attitudes in the crazy arm-chairs.

There was a pause. What was to come next?

Then Essie Smeeth looked maliciously across at Major Hodge. He was amusing himself by casting tender glances at Fuzzy,

whose jealousy had been emitting little flashes during the crepuscular sports. Poor Fuzzy ! If she had been ridiculously jealous, she now at once looked as absurdly happy. Her healthy face was all conscious of it, and her cheeks were like red winter-apples glowing under the deceptive warmth of that gaze.

Now it was Essie's turn to feel the smart of pin-prick wounds to her vanity and emulation—the outer integuments of her heart, which, like too many of the Marstown girls, she often supposed to be part of the kernel—(that might, indeed, with time, run risk of becoming inseparable from it !).

“I say, do you remember all laughing yesterday at a hole in Grace's stockings ?” she suddenly asked. And her voice heralded so plainly some further important announcement, that everyone at once sat up,

all attention, excepting Major Hodge and Mr. Jones. "Well, I expect you'll all laugh at the wrong side of your mouths over our stockings now, for many a long day! owing to the goodness of two kind friends" (in a tone of triumph).

Looks of wonder from all the party, excepting from Major Hodge and Mr. Jones. The latter indeed wore an expression of bashfulness at conscious merit; while the Major, glancing apprehensively at Fuzzy, tried to steer clear of the impending crisis by interrupting with an awkward laugh.

"Oh, come! come, now, Miss Essie; that's not fair, 'pon my honour. That will do. You promised not to tell" (this last in a whisper).

But he little knew Miss Essie; when the affair in hand was to discomfit a rival.

She pounced upon a brown paper parcel, ostentatiously hidden near (if the expression may be pardoned); and, pulling it open, displayed a dozen and a half of gay stockings, which she flourished under the very eyes of Fuzzy and Pussy Cox.

“*There!*—that is what Major Hodge and Mr. Jones bought for us this very morning.”

The Cox family seemed dumbstruck.

“By Jingo! the fat is all in the fire, now,” thus Daisy heard the Major murmur confidentially to Smiler Lee, with a fatuous grin. “I must beat a retreat, or these two young women will tear me in pieces between them. When two girls get jealous about a man he has devilish hard cards to play, to please them both.”

This revelation acted, truly, like a thunderbolt upon the Cox sisters.

They, indeed, tried to recover them-

selves, and uttered due little expressions of admiration, tipped with poison, as “Lovely!—What, *all* of them striped round in colours—won’t you feel rather like the clowns in Hengler’s Circus ; or as if you had zebra’s legs, dear ?”

But Fuzzy said, with a frankness that was blunt and all her own,

“ Well, I’m sure we ought all to be glad you’ve got them—for, *you wanted them very badly !*”

After this, the Cox party were subdued ; the games had lost their flavour ; and they intimated that it was more than time to depart.

The Smeeths, on the other hand, with suppressed triumph, expressed wonder they should go so soon ; adding, with hospitable *empressement*,

“ But at least, Major Hodge, *you’ll* stay—and Mr. Jones.”

To remain behind seemed wisest to the two latter gallant warriors ; whom Fuzzy and Pussy now regarded with high heads and haughty, averted gaze, whilst their colour was again of a deeper glow than its usual robust hue.

Jack Dimity of course prepared to escort his sister and her friends home. And the ever-gallant Smiler felt it his duty likewise to accompany the sister of his friend.

As they went homewards through the silent streets, both Pussy and Fuzzy were extremely silent, and could not be much roused, even by the presence of their guardians.

But Birdie was in wildest spirits.

She danced along the echoing pavement ; chaffed Jack ; tried to withdraw Mr. Lee's attentions from Daisy to herself ; and finally rushed up to one or two houses and rang the bells, before they knew what she was

about (a lark in which the Smiler seemed much tempted to join her, although he still remained faithful to Daisy's side).

“Oh! Baby dear, do be quiet,” Daisy could hear Fuzzy murmur; although it must have been inaudible to others. “One would think that, when we are vexed, it is bread and treacle for you!”

To which peculiar saying, Miss Birdie pertly replied,

“And do either of you really think I ought to cry because you do. Thank goodness! my men don't throw *me* over like that.”

CHAPTER XIV.

“Then, Chloe, still go on to prate
Of thirty-six and thirty-eight ;
Pursue your trade of scandal-picking,
Your hints that Stella is no chicken ;
Your inuendoes when you tell us
That Stella loves to talk with fellows.”

NEXT morning, there was a constant
succession of young lady visitors at
the Cox family mansion.

These were not received in the drawing-room ; which the Cox girls declared, with some truth, their mother kept so terribly tidy that no one could be comfortable in it. It was, indeed, even painfully precise.

Each morning, its faded but elegant

mistress with her own hands re-arranged the dozen of high walnut chairs on the precise squares of carpet they were to occupy. And if her own elegant photograph book had been moved a hair's-breadth from its proper solitary position on the one bare side of the oval walnut table, it was carefully replaced under a light glass-and-electro, but flowerless epergne; opposite an equally elegant, empty inkstand—for ink, if used, has a trick of spoiling elegant tables. Mrs. Cox used to explain that her daughters being so different from herself in the matter of tidiness, if she once allowed these arrangements to be disturbed by an inch, she would never be able to restore them to order. And there might have been some truth in that.

So the young lady friends, who had been “made free of the house,” were wont to be received in a little “muddle-room,” as the

Cox girls called it, that was behind the drawing-room, and which Mrs. Cox generally designated as her daughters' boudoir.

On this especial morning, as pairs of girls after girls came in, were succeeded, and departed, they were each and all regaled with the delicious story of the Smeeths' present of stockings.

"Of *stockings*!—did ever anyone even hear of such a thing?" the Cox girls would exclaim, with lively gibes against their dear hostesses of yesterday; for both Fuzzy and Pussy had evidently resolved to make the best of the matter. "Really, although it is natural enough to receive some presents from gentlemen, still the line might be drawn at *stockings*!"

And all the visitors, raising their hands, either literally or figuratively, acquiesced; declaring, yes, really! the line might be drawn there!

"But, surely, Major Hodge and Mr. Jones are your men, girls?" observed one disagreeably-playful friend. "How very naughty of them to give presents to Essie and Grace!"

"Not at all. It was simple good-nature, when they saw how the poor things were in rags," smartly retorted Fuzzy, tossing her head and biting her lips. "Of course, they have given us little presents too. Major Hodge had a beautiful silver brooch made for me; with a rose; the badge of their regiment. You may have seen me wear it."

"What; that great big thing? Oh, yes, dear, *constantly*! It is never out of the side of your hat. I never knew it was a rose. (It is very like a cauliflower.)"

This last to the nearest other visitor.

"And Mr. Jones gave me a Welsh flannel-shawl; woven only in that part of

Wales to which his family belongs," said Pussy pensively.

"But that," added both the sisters, each referring to her own gift, "is a very different thing."

Of course, the visitors all agreed with them.

And now the romps of the preceding evening at the Smeeths' house were equally described, and lightly derided.

Talk strengthened talk: so by-and-by Daisy was quite astonished to find how much the Coxes had secretly disapproved of last night's amusements. Plainly, she now found, they had disliked the sports as much as herself, but, having, no doubt, more worldly wisdom, had successfully hidden the fact. As the conversation went on, she was quite glad to find that the Coxes had a so much higher standard of behaviour than she could have supposed.

And, though sorry for the Smeeths, she was relieved, as to her good opinion of Marstown girls, to find all the visitors unanimous in condemning vaguely all misbehaviour on the part of others; and in declaring *they never did such things*.

In the full swing of this, the formerly-mentioned sprightly young person electrified Daisy by suddenly turning to her, playfully observing:

“And so you hid with Mr. Lee. He is quite your man, isn’t he?”

“Oh, yes, he is quite her man. *We* saw you in the gardens yesterday,” cried out everyone else, much amused at little Miss Dimity’s dismay and instant blush.

The delicate and distant manner in which she and young Polly at Elm Hall had been wont to allude to shy possibilities of future admirers had been so different.

Of course, their notions of such beings were founded on Waverley Novels, and fostered in retirement. And, of course, they both were secretly convinced that Ivanhoe's descendants, the true latter-day knights, must be officers of whom their brother Jack (if not the most courtly) was a most honest squire and valiant. And now the talk turned on a dance, to be given that evening by a Mrs. Brandiston-Browne.

The fact that she was to be taken to it had been a little secret, only imparted to Daisy the day after her arrival. She had been immensely delighted on hearing it; and so she now told the playful young lady.

“Ah, yes. The Coxes, all three, wanted to go to it; so I know they had a little tiff with their mother, for she said one of them must give up to you. So they said

nothing, I suppose, till they should have fought it out," replied the playful damsel, in light confidence. " Luckily, Mrs. Brandiston-Browne heard of you, and said you must come, too ; of course—Mr. Dimity's sister. They didn't dare to ask her for an invite. They didn't know her very well, you see."

While Daisy sat rather silenced by this revelation, the Coxes kept talking very familiarly of *dear* Mrs. Brandiston-Browne ; and of how very charming her parties were ; and what a pity it was those among their dear friends present were not among the happy and select few invited.

Some of the young ladies in question seemed inclined to demur to all this, but were obliged to keep silence, lest they should be supposed envious. But the rest all vied with the Coxes in intimating that they were also admitted to the honour of

Mrs. Brandiston-Browne's warmest friendship.

This lady appeared to Daisy to be considered as in one of Marstown's most select sets. And it was surprising how many sets there were; and with what mild contempt, or subdued envy, one set spoke of the other.

"And how do you like Marstown, Miss Dimity?" all the visitors of that morning kept asking.

When Miss Dimity replied that she liked it very much, it was all so new to her, such a different life from that in the country, several of the young ladies exclaimed, "Ah, yes! After all, there is nothing like a garrison town, is there?—always something gay going on, such good society." And, pleased with Daisy's ingenuous praises, they severally assured her she would find few places (after Lon-

don) more musically, artistically, histrionically inclined than Marstown. For *the officers* were always giving amateur theatricals; and so many of *them* drew beautifully; and so many of *them* sang or played (by ear) in a small but most delightful and clever way.

Also the young ladies answered for themselves. They also loved music, adored painting, and were all dying to act with the *officers*; only that not to create jealousies these last always insisted on having professional actresses.

In fact—for all this, as for fashion, *ton*, and general *comme il faut*-ness, Daisy was given to understand Marstown and its inhabitants had few rivals.

And they all ended by saying or implying, “Certainly, Marstown has very good society; but then men make the society;

and what men are so delightful as officers?"

This was all most instructive, as to the young ladies' view-point.

But every question has two sides. In another chapter we shall likewise see these much-flattered officers' views on the subject; and let us hope they will be equally flattering to the Marstown young ladies.

Jack Dimity was coming this day to have his lunch, at the Coxes' midday dinner. He had been warmly invited to come whenever he could, for, as Mrs. Cox kindly said, "Naturally his sister would like to see as much of him as possible."

But as yet, somehow, Daisy had not seen much of him; although he had come several times; his attention being perforce taken up with his young hostesses.

Mr. Lee had also been asked the previous night; asked less warmly, but, as Fuzzy was overheard explaining to her mother, "We could not well help it when he saw us home from the Smeeths, and he was standing by when we asked Mr. Dimity."

"Oh! well, in that case you did right to ask him."

Mrs. Cox replied in a cold manner that seemed strange to Daisy, who was sitting quietly near. She was so gentle and so very innocent about such matters that mother and daughters ventured to speak very naturally and carelessly before her; seeming to consider her rather wanting or foolish in worldly ways.

The Smiler, however, came not, eagerly as he had sprung at the invitation—for which, indeed, he had previously angled.

"So Mr. Lee has not arrived; faithless

Mr. Lee!" softly smiled Mrs. Cox, as she floated downstairs to lunch. And all the girls echoed,

"Yes, indeed, he is always such a gay deceiver."

Somehow Daisy seemed to imagine (though it seemed foolish) that these sentences were directed *at* herself; but why, she could not imagine.

Jack explained his friend's absence, so far as he could, by saying the latter had been out since five that morning with his men at musketry--some miles away. And how on earth he had ever imagined he could get back for lunch, was more than Jack could conceive.

In the middle of luncheon, up rattled a hansom furiously, and the irrepressible Smiler shot himself out of it like a human missile; dismissed the driver with a joke in a jiffy; and, entering the room, as it

seemed, the very same instant, exclaimed,

“Here I am!—got back from my work and jumped into mufti, before you could say Jack Robinson, Mrs. Cox.”

That lady welcomed him warmly to a place at her own side; but so elegantly, who could imagine her saying “Jack Robinson!”

Instead she said, with tender solicitude,

“I fear you will injure your health, Mr. Lee. You do so much during the day; and to-night you will be at Mrs. Brandiston-Browne’s, of course? If I were your mother, I should be really uneasy about you.”

“Yes, out at dinner to-night, and then to this ball, and to-morrow again up at five and out. Lunch and dinner somewhere else; always something! always keeping the ball rolling! I couldn’t live without it, Mrs. Cox, I almost believe; though I

sometimes think it will be the death of me," replied the Smiler, for five instants succeeding in pulling down the corners of his mouth, depressing the tips of Armado's "excrement," his moustache, and dolorously rolling his eyes. The luxury of being pitied, and of pitying himself for that short space of time, being irresistible.

But he could stand it no longer than five seconds ; and began a laugh again, immediately.

"Ho, ho, ho ! the fellows all wonder at how I do it. Oh ! three hours' sleep, two hours' sleep, *no* sleep does me very often. Eh, Dimity, you often wonder how I keep it up, don't you ?" acting a poke at Jack's ribs, though yards away.

"I wonder at you for being such a fool as not to give it up," quoth Jack, rudely ; trying to take down the conceit of his comrade-in-arms.

“ You old Growler ! Is that the way you answer your best friend ; you are the greatest ruffian—— ! ” gleefully laughed the Smiler, with imperturbable good-humour, and a jollity that infected even Mrs. Cox into smiling vulgarly broadly, for once. “ Don’t believe him any of you, pray ! He would give anything to be able to keep it up as I do. Why, our colonel, I do assure you all, spoke to me only the other day about it :

“ ‘ You’ll kill yourself, Lee,’ he said, ‘ if you go on at this rate ’ (gloomily).

“ ‘ I hope not, sir,’ I said. ‘ Anyhow, I’ve been at it for the last five or six years ; and it hasn’t killed *me* yet (reviving at remembrance of that happy hit).

“ ‘ Well ; but you will not be able to do your work properly,’ was his next objection. (Good old fellow ! speaks to me like a father.) Upon which I said, ‘ Sir, I

have always heard that the Duke of Wellington said his best officers were the *greatest dandies*. He couldn't say another word" (triumphantly!).

As they went upstairs to the drawing-room afterwards, young Lee managed to whisper in Daisy's ear,

"Ah! you demure little lady, I haven't been able to have a word with *you* yet. Do you know, I saw Mr. Jones this morning, and he told me you were a capital person to buy blue ribbon. Ha, ha, ha; ho, ho, ho! Oh! you naughty, naughty little Miss Dimity, what are you going to do with it?" Daisy begged him to hush in a fright; wondering how much he knew; what he guessed.

She tried to find out, being anxious on poor Fuzzy's account. But the provoking youth would only seat himself on the piano-stool, and, striking a few preliminary

chords with a crash (playing only by ear, for he never had patience to learn his notes) he sang the old song—

“He promised to buy me a bunch of blue riband
To tie up my bonny brown hair.”

And that was all about the blue ribbon
Daisy could then extract from him.

CHAPTER XV.

“For men, my Love, still talk of higher themes,
 Of war and policy, of Church and State ;
 And do not like your silly gossips’ prate,
 Of : Who wears this—: Who’s older than she seems.”

“O no, we never mention her,
 Her name is never heard.”

IN the last chapter we saw the opinion of the Marstown young ladies upon Mrs. Brandiston-Browne’s coming ball ; and on Marstown society generally ; especially the garrison element.

Now, would it not be almost more instructive to flit down invisibly to the Marstown barracks, and hear the opinion of some of the officers there upon these young ladies.

That same evening, Jack Dimity, and the still indefatigable Smiler Lee, were paying a visit to Captain Gascoigne in the latter's barrack-room.

It was a dull enough room when you took your first glance, yet at the second it was rather pleasant, and at last grew upon one. It boasted no flowers in the window, nor china plates painted by the owner and hung on the wall among whips and photographs—like that of Smiler Lee. Nor again was it adorned with gaudy sporting prints in glorious confusion, as if all the young sub-lieutenants had been making hay therein—like Jack Dimity's den. It was severely simple in its furnishing; almost dainty in its neatness.

Two easy-chairs and a sofa seemed to mark the limits to which the host meant to stretch hospitality; but they were supposed to be more comfortable than those of anyone else.

A few books were carefully arranged ; bad backs, but best of authors. Two small prints only were on the walls ; but proofs before the letter.

The room faced the north, and might be gloomy in winter except for fire-glow. Now in June it was cool and shadowed. A dull red shade in curtains, in chintz coverings, and in the square of Eastern carpet in the middle of the dark-stained boards, gave a grateful warmth of tone. Still it was inartistic, according to Lee ; whose latest hobby was preaching the delicacy of daffodil shades blended with chocolate in a bas-relief of frogs and flowers on a wall of dead gold, in an " indescribable (as he described it) Arabian Nights kind of sort of idea."

" Real high art, you know," he said, now leaning his back gracefully against the plain red velvet chimney-board, that bore

no knick-knacks but a few really useful articles, such as the neatest kind of match-boxes or pipe-stands. He kept waving his cigar, as he taught the others, in a didactic, yet airy manner.

“Real high art! I wish you would tell us what high art *really* is,” said the host, lazily and sarcastically, from his chair-depths. They were all smoking, and the room was redolent of many such past pleasant smokes. “One hears nothing but high art talked of by all the Marstown young ladies. Some of them showed me the other day a whole service of honest kitchen delf (as I should call it), hung at every imaginable different height round their untidy drawing-room, making it still more hideous; and that was high art, they said. And at the last ball most of the girls seemed to me frightfully badly dressed, with no petticoats, and short,

shabby, economical-looking gowns, like so many walking bolster-cases. One or two, I could almost swear, had on their Sunday frocks, with the sleeves ripped out and their arms showing instead; but still they all informed me (without any inquiries on my part) that their dresses were high art! High art apparently meant plenty of bare arm to the shoulder, dancing in mittens to save gloves, and wearing lots of cheap silver bangles." The speaker roused himself to deliver this sweeping, unusual censure on his part with unusual animation.

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed the Smiler, artfully counterfeiting even more mirth than he felt at this outburst. (He was frightfully afraid of being pressed to explain his artistic ideas; having a lurking suspicion that his friend knew more on the matter than he did, and therefore anxious to lure

Gascoigne to other high themes.) “Why, I did not imagine you would know what dress any girl had on. And you never seem to even look at any of them here. You never go anywhere that you could see them.”

“Oh! yes, I do,” meditatively asserted Gascoigne, lapsing into his dreamy cigar-mood again. “I went to one ball, and looked on at the door for some time—that was quite enough for me. And I have seen them by day too! I was at the band yesterday,” with an air of making the most of that experience of Marstown gaieties; so that no one need accuse him of not having fairly tried them first, like an upright gentleman.

“But they really are the vilest-dressed girls here!” renewed Lee, as if his sense of the beautiful was so excruciated he must exhaust his denunciations. “Only, poor

things, they are so badly off I declare it would be a capital thing to give one or two of them a new dress for our ball, eh? Really I have half a mind to do it—make the room look so much better, too!”

“If they can’t afford to go out much, why *should* they go out?” said Gascoigne, rather severely for such a kindly-hearted man. “I have known very poor girls who had to dress on next to nothing; but I respected their makeshifts, because they never told me it was high art. And when they could not afford to go out, they stayed at home.”

“All I ask is, that they should be cleanly and pretty tidy,” put in Jack. “But the Smeeths, I declare, were simply coming to pieces at the last tennis party here in barracks. I was thinking of getting a needle and thread myself and sewing their flounces on for them.”

“I declare I might spare them some of my red silk handkerchiefs to wear as new toques or turbans ; theirs are so horribly old. They have only one apiece, they have worn since last winter,” took up the Smiler, with gay impertinence.

“Yes, indeed. I think, I might also give them a round hat or two, and an ulster coat, out of my own wardrobe. Girls flatter us so by imitation now-a-days,” chimed in Jack ; and so they went on in most harmonious antiphony.

Gascoigne only, having delivered himself of all the spleen that was in him, said never a word more ; but listened amusedly to the other two.

Whenever the talk approached the subject of the Coxes, however, young Dimity was silent ; because he felt that having, on impulse, acceded to their skilfully-made request that his sister should come and

stay with them, he had forfeited the right of discussing them.

And he liked them—after a fashion.

Still he felt uneasy lest Daisy should be confounded with them and talked about as he had done of the Marstown girls.

The others guessed something of this, perhaps. At least Gascoigne said, in his slow way, that might be either dubiousness or deliberation; and with a questioning tone,

“The Coxes seem to be much better dressed than the other girls here, though; don’t they? And they seem to have better style, too, and be altogether nice people.”

Young Lee looked at his somewhat older friend, with a moment’s *naïf* surprise. But as Gascoigne’s facial muscles remained immoveable, and betrayed no shade of secret satire, his really simple-hearted junior—who could be led by a silk thread

by everyone he liked, and who was good-nature's very essence—warmly assented.

Only Jack—who, though so much younger again than the Smiler, had more acumen, and an uncommonly large allowance of common sense—growled.

At that Gascoigne did smile faintly to himself. He liked Jack. Jack's growls amused him. He liked studying characters, in a kindly way, in his own mind, and young Dimity's moods repaid him, whilst Lee was as easy to scan as a child's A B C picture-book.

“Are you going to the Brandiston-Browne's ball?” asked the former young fellow now abruptly of the others, to change the subject.

“Of course.”

“Certainly not.”

“You regular old misanthrope!” exclaimed Lee, turning at that last to Gas-

coigne. "Why not, eh? You are surely not going to give up going out?"

"Who on earth are the Brandiston-Brownes?" was all Gascoigne made by way of answer. "I don't much care for Marstown society in any way; it is no better, and rather worse than most garri-son towns. Still Mrs. B.-B. struck me as one of the most appalling females in the whole place. She brought out the Peerage the one only day she got me calling there, and the page showing me first cousin to a lord was doubled down. 'You see,' she said, 'we know all about you; we know all about your connections!'"

At which remembrance the speaker knocked off his cigar-ash with such a disgusted look that the other two loudly laughed.

"Well, she handed *me* 'Burke's Landed Gentry,' and asked me to show her all

about myself," put in Lee. "But when she found I was only the younger son of a younger son, she dropped me like a hot potato for a week. By ill-luck somebody has gone and told her I have expectations from an old aunt; and my life has been positively a burden ever since. She and that terrible crane of a tall daughter have pressed me to go to lunch, dine, even *breakfast*, till—Well you know" (with a deprecatory ha! ha!) "I have generally helped myself out with some blarney; but even I am at my wits' end for excuses."

The others facetiously condoled with their comrade with mock pity.

"Ah! it's all very well to laugh, but she'll ask my intentions soon, I do believe," retorted poor Smiler, solemnly shaking his head. "She's an awful old woman! Do you know that little room near the hall? She sits in there, I'm

told, and waylays the fellows before they go upstairs, so as to 'spare her dear girl's feelings.' Ugh! She did it to five men in the same regiment once. It was here some time before us, they say, so I'm in for it. Lots of fellows might funk it, but I'm rather keen for the excitement of the thing." (With a lightsome smile playing over his darkly-stern resolve to meet the dame in terrible close combat, and win or die in the encounter.)

"I am glad you like the idea of it," quoth Gascoigne, with a dry smile; "but still, who are these people, Dimity? They give themselves such airs, that I am curious on the subject."

"Well, old Browne's father was a big butcher, and afterwards mayor here; neither more nor less. He christened his eldest hopeful Brandiston, in compliment to the customers who bought his primest

beef and mutton—an old county family here, since died out, or ‘gone to the dogs.’ This present Brown (old Brandynose, as they call him) became a lawyer; and married an attorney’s daughter (Smiler’s future mother-in-law!). So, to look fine, she adopted the name of Brandiston before the Brown, and tacked on an *e* after it.”

“I see; affix and prefix. So now all the progeny will call themselves Brandiston-Brownes, *ad infinitum*, without any right. That sort of thing is done constantly now-a-days,” said Gascoigne, with the regretful tone of a stickler for old-fashioned honesty, if not for old quarterings.

“When any new regiments come here, they are apt to imagine that these are some of the old Brandistons, now extinct,” added Jack. “And Mrs. Browne rather fosters the delusion by observing that, though not related, they are, in a way,

connected. . . . Well, I must be off now."

"Well, I wish you both a pleasant evening; and may neither of you marry, nor be given in marriage to Miss Brandiston-Browne," returned Gascoigne, turning a hankering eye already on the *Revue des Deux Mondes* lying open near him.

"Marriage! I believe the Marstown young women think of nothing on this earth else than of how to get married," uttered Jack, like a young St. Kevin, as he took himself off.

"But they are not very likely to catch any of us," called back the Smiler, with a gay vainglory dating from having come off unscarred after several campaigns in similar stations.

He loved indeed, as he phrased it, going out on the war-path.

CHAPTER XVI.

“He saw a cottage with a double coach-house,
A cottage of gentility ;
And the devil was pleased, for his darling vice
Is the pride that apes humility.”

BEFORE going to the dance, a second great passage of arms (fought, however, with much silence) took place in the Cox family.

The question was, how should they all go ; since the doctor's tiny brougham was truly hardly capable of holding three—yet they were five ladies. It had been resolved by the sisters that one of the officers' wives, Mrs. Luxton, a merry, pretty young

woman, should be asked to take one of them. To this (Mrs. Cox having made the request, as instructed by her daughters, with her utmost elegance of manner) Mrs. Luxton readily assented; glad enough thereby to repay many little hospitalities, teas and luncheons, that had been pressed upon her by the Coxes.

The next question was, who should go?

All three were eager. It was a keen point of rivalry between the sisters, which was the most intimate friend of Mrs. Luxton.

But Birdie, as usual, carried the day.

With assurance she declared that she had been specially asked. The rest, surprised, could only wonder that nothing had been known of this before. Birdie, indignant, wished to ask did they doubt her truth? She did not care to go; but she would not have her word questioned.

In fact (with tears), nothing would now induce her to go ; anyone else might that chose. Of course no one else now would : and, in the end, the young lady allowed herself to be persuaded to accept the coveted position.

Mrs. Brandiston-Browne's was a very tiny house ; the family means not having swelled with the family name. Her guests, as we know, were considered few, —she being so very select.

Still they seemed to throng the stairs, on which no two people had room to pass ; they overflowed into the lady's bed-room, set apart as a cloak-room for lady-guests ; they trickled into what was called a boudoir close by, but that was obviously the dressing-room of Mr. Brandiston-Browne ; they surged into a den below stairs termed the study, where gentlemen's hats were piled in darkness and disarray ;

they crowded the tea-room that was (painfully evidently) the guest's bed-room; they were already half exuding into the street, it seemed—as, after the first few dances, they sat for coolness and space on the window-sills.

Daisy all in white and tremors, with pink sashes and blushes, followed Mrs. Cox and her two eldest daughters down from the cloak-room, and struggled against the up-stream of guests valiantly. Jack met them at the foot of the stairs, with the cares of a chaperon making deep furrows on his boyish brow.

“Look here, little one, I'll come to you between *every* dance; for as it's your first one, I must look after you, you know,” he murmured, ignoring, apparently, Mrs. Cox's maternal cares. “And if nobody else asks you, you'd better dance with me, for it doesn't do to be sitting.”

“ Oh ! thank you, Jack dear. Has—has Captain Gascoigne come to-night ? ”

“ He, no ; he has more sense.”

Daisy’s relief was so great, it was rather akin to regret—a peculiar feeling ; but so she explained it to herself.

Mrs. Browne was in the hall, or rather—the entry.

They had already passed hooded and cloaked under her very nose, but both hostess and guests, respecting social humbug, had discreetly ignored each other.

Now she welcomed them duly, in a voice as ear-splitting as a peacock’s scream.

She was a little woman with a face like parchment ; dressed in a snuff-coloured silk gown, with an old-fashioned pendant like two gilded vipers coiling round a garnet, slung on a harsh, black velvet-ribbon round her wrinkled throat. She received Daisy with excruciating intensity of friend-

liness in her tone ; pressed her hand ; and at once “presented” her to a row of feather-bed mothers all dressed in black silk gowns cut heart-shaped, many gold chains, and red flowered caps, as—“Miss Dimity, of Elm Hall, Royalshire, you know.”

The stout ladies all preened themselves, as it were ; and looked at Daisy as if, after due time, they might find breath to remark that she was quite an equal. Daisy looked at them, and wondered what on earth she ought to say to them.

But, at that moment, she found herself forcibly taken possession of and carried away by the Smiler, who had the air of a gay young Buccaneer.

“The first dance is half over. Fancy your being so late ; and I have been waiting for you all this time, you naughty little lady! . . . Why, *of course* I was not going

to have the first dance with anyone but yourself."

As he bore her away, they could hear Mrs. Browne expatiating to her friends, "Yes, a charming girl, Miss Dimity; so glad to have her at my little dance. Very old family, you know; established at Elm Hall before the Normans; her father is the member there——"

"*He's not!*" Daisy exclaimed, with some concern, checking her partner's struggling progress.

She did not quite like to add also that the Dimitys were much, much later at Elm Hall than the time of the Doomsday-book.

"Mrs. Browne is quite under a misconception about papa's being a member. Perhaps I ought to go back and tell her it is a mistake."

At this Mr. Lee laughed so immoderate-

ly, he could hardly compose himself enough to say, in dissuasion,

“Not for worlds! She loves to make out fortunes and pedigrees for all of us. We’ll go back after this turn, and listen to her at it with somebody else.”

It was gliding, it was flying, it was skating to music to dance with the Smiler!

Daisy thought so, after a long, long round, as she panted as much from pleasure as breathlessness.

“You went very nicely; very nicely indeed,” said her partner, patronisingly. “Let me tell you what, Miss Dimity—if only you had a little more practice (you *don’t* mind my saying that, do you? No! sensible girl!)—if only you had a little good practice and some hints you would be a CLIPPER.”

The future clipper humbly expressed

gratified delight, and anxiety to adopt all Mr. Lee's kind hints.

"You see I have never danced with a real gentleman before (that is to say, with a real man); only with Polly. I forgot you don't know her; she is my sister. We used to try round and round on the school-room carpet, that was pretty well worn, but still it was hard work. But, indeed, Mr. Lee" (beseechingly), "if you would teach me a little, I should be so glad."

"Teach you! Of course, Dimity's sister; why, you belong to the regiment. Trouble! don't speak of it," with flattered satisfaction. "But if I may be your teacher (ho, ho, ho! excuse my laughing, but you do look such a charming pupil in that pretty frock!), I must have four—six,—come! seven or eight dances to-night. There! I'll write them on my shirt-cuff—you'll remember them?"

“Never,” uttered Daisy, with parted lips and intense lugubriousness. “Never. I have no memory at all, and Jack has just introduced me to two friends of his in your regiment, and said I *must not* forget their dances on any account. Oh, you need not ask; I can’t tell their names. They are thin, tall boys, with drab faces and tow-coloured hair.”

The Smiler screamed with delight at this description of his young sub-lieutenants; and at Daisy’s distraction.

“I’ll tell you what, I shall write down your engagements, too, if you like, on my other cuff, and then you can always come and ask me,” he said, in confidentially paternal tones. “No thanks. Why! Dimity’s sister must be looked after. But, I say, tell me whom you heard talking of my dancing; come, do just tell me? Pure curiosity, you know—. I don’t care what people say about me.”

His countenance slightly fell, however, as Daisy truthfully assured him her opinion was only based on her personal experience.

At this moment the "handsomest man in the British Army" stopped them, as he lounged languidly in the doorway. He murmured a request for a waltz, too.

"Your first dance this, isn't it, Miss Dimity? How very refreshing!"

"And I can tell you *what*, O'Donoghue," impressively whispered the Smiler, in a tone meant to be perfectly audible to Daisy. "With a very little more practice, she'll beat all these other girls hollow. So light!—only a little practice, and she'll be a CLIPPER!"

"Do you know, Miss Dimity, that Mr. Lee is considered the best dancer in the British Army?" asked Captain O'Donoghue, in an equally impressive aside of Daisy,

with a gentle smile. He was used to having such confidences imparted by his friend, predicting that every fresh ball-room favourite would be a "clipper;" and he never failed to play his part in return. "Do you know that many young ladies would give a good deal to have their step as much praised by him?"

Little Miss Dimity was hereupon led away by the laughing, protesting Best Dancer; being so overpowered at his infinite condescension in engaging her for so many fast dances, she was inclined to beg him not thus to sacrifice himself.

With much difficulty, they found two seats; and now began to look around them.

The rooms in which dancing had been going on were connected by folding-doors; being plainly, in their ordinary state, drawing and dining-rooms. They

were small, ill-lit, and stifflingly hot ; but it was a breezy night, and, whenever a window was opened, the wind caused wax candles to come guttering down on everyone's coats, till the suppressed execrations of the gentlemen must have made the heart of each a small pandemonium.

As to decorations, a pair of shrunken, washed muslin curtains were looped untidily between the two mean, little apartments ; and in the centre of these was suspended an earthen flower-pot, containing a small plant—genus unknown. The exquisiteness of this floral adornment, and Daisy's indignation at the pot not even having been well cleaned, tickled the Smiler's fancy so much that he proposed a voyage of discovery round the rest of the family band-box mansion.

“ *Why* did Captain Gascoigne not come to-night ?” little Miss Dimity now ventured

to inquire of the easy-going Smiler, although surely having learnt his absence from Jack might have been sufficient.

“Why? Oh! because there was no one here he cared to dance with, evidently,” in a careless tone. (Miss Dimity mused at that; yet the person in question had cared to go to the band yesterday.)

In the doorway, as they tried to pass out, Mrs. Browne was still welcoming a small, in-flowing stream of ladies with the voice of a macaw; or peering with an anxious eye to see what gentlemen she could swoop on to be introduced—for introducing young men and maidens was her weak point, her (perhaps amiable) cacoethes.

Not a marriage had taken place in her set for years, but she would say with pride, “I introduced them.”

Now, she absolutely dropped, hawk-like,

on young Dimity, who had made a bold effort to get past unscathed.

“Stop, stop, Mr. Dimity ; let me introduce you to my girl. You don’t know her, I think. She was dancing when you came in. She is so run after for her dancing—though I should not say so. My love, have you kept a dance you could give Mr. Dimity ?”

Thus Jack was ruefully “nailed” to dance with this faded Terpsichore, who was like a thin crane, and seemed to stand on one leg ; also, as she had a pale, prominent nose, and carried her head pensively downcast she seemed, like that bird, to be seeking food (for meditation, or otherwise) in the ground evermore.

Mrs. Browne could next be distinctly heard uttering, in bland explanation to the black-silken-robed, stout sisterhood,

“A young man of such charming man-

ners, Mr. Dimity is ; heir to a very fine country estate, and a deer-park."

At this Daisy tittered, thereby spoiling the Smiler's insinuating endeavour to slip behind his hostess's back ; for, with the hearing of a lynx, she turned, smiling.

" Ah ! little Miss Dimity ! " she exclaimed, with that petting air everyone generally would adopt towards that small damsel, to the occasional offence of her dignity.

" Oh ! let me introduce *you* ! Mr. Higginbotham."

There was a very round-shouldered young man standing near, with watery eyes, red nose, and a corpulent person. The word " lout " alone describes the impression his mere sight produced ; and the Smiler, perceiving his partner shudder, would have made a gallant dash for freedom, but that Mrs. Brandiston-Browne

had laid a skinny claw upon Daisy's arm, and held her fast.

“My dear, don't mind his looks; he's a *bon parti*! Will have two thousand a year of his very own, and only two lives between him and a baronetcy!” she explained, loudly, in Daisy's ear, making her shudder; and giving her an encouraging little push in the back, so that she nearly went into the future baronet's arms.

The young man's eyes watered over Daisy. He produced a little china-edged slate from his pocket, breathed on it, rubbed it with his cuff. Then, as she murmured, dismayed, “The—the tenth dance” in answer to a request that seemed gasped out as if he were smothering in a feather-bed, he, as it were, smacked his lips, announcing,

“I'll come and look for you. I'll be sure to find you.”

When they escaped, Jack confronted them in the hall.

“Did she introduce you to that brute, Daisy? I won’t have you dance with him; get out of it as you like.”

“Oh, but, Jack dear, what am I to do? He is *dreadful*! But you told me no lady ought *ever to throw anyone over for a dance*.”

“Don’t mind,” laughed Smiler Lee, “for you’ve been and gone and given the poor fellow one of my dances, so I’ll come up and declare you promised it to me.” (A great big fib on his part: that made dance number eight he had claimed, as Daisy, with a sort of horrified pleasure, suspected, but had no courage, if she had will to protest.)

“Of course, no lady ought ever to throw a gentleman over. You must not throw any of our fellows over,” said young Rhadamanthus, with grandiose severity, and a

brotherly eye. "But that cad is very different, and, if he attempts to dance with you, I'll have to drag you away from him."

"Jack dear, I'm afraid Mrs. Browne made a mistake about your charming manners," roguishly exclaimed his sister, and, leaving him to growl, she and Lee gaily danced off to inspect the premises.

They could get no further than the dressing-room boudoir, however; where Mr. Browne's boots, protruding from under a sofa, were the only available articles of furniture on which couples were not sitting.

Likewise, there was a sofa on the landing, discreetly veiled with washed and worn muslin curtains, and lighted by an evil-smelling Chinese lantern.

The Smiler plunged down rather too ecstatically on this resting-place, when, to his horror, it sank immediately on one

back-leg beneath him, and he and Daisy seemed playing see-saw.

Stifled mirth was heard on the stairs, and Major Hodge's burly form, with Fuzzy Cox peeping behind him, appeared, having been hid by the curtains.

"We broke that some time ago, and we're watching to see how many more couples will go down on it," they explained.

"But I say, Hodge, is there no other place to sit?" uttered the poor Smiler, lamentably. "Miss Dimity and I here have been dancing like Anything for the last two vales, but we can't get a simple stool to rest on, nor a penny-piece of room even to stand."

"Not a spot; it's only a two-storied house, and we very nearly found ourselves pushed out on the slates with the crowd up there."

"And we've been searching downstairs,

and the kitchen is the only spot not thrown open," lowed Mr. Jones, with his deep voice, looking more bovine than ever, coming up with Pussy on his arm. Jack and Birdie now eagerly joined the friendly conclave, the first asking,

"Where d'ye think the furniture is all stored? How they'll sleep to-night is a mystery." The maiden chimed in,

"Isn't it a shame? They have locked the tea-room door, so that we can't get any more refreshments till supper-time . . . And isn't it hot?"

"Hot—I believe you!" uttered the "best dancer" in the British Army, fanning himself with his handkerchief. "I'll tell you all what, I must have something to drink. So let us all meet after each dance, and fairly besiege that supper-room."

So said, so done. After each succeeding dance the same thirsty coterie were in

the van of the disappointed crowd who rushed to the closed door.

Locked ! Locked still !

“I declare,” vowed Jack, “if the old woman doesn’t open it soon, we’ll all go to the pump round the corner.”

By this time the Smiler, who so loved dancing he could hardly stop any more than the famous man with the cork leg—which when wound up never could leave off going—was hotter and thirstier than ever.

Jack was growling thunders, heedless that Mrs. Browne was still “introducing” her dear young friends with macaw screeches a few feet away.

Daisy had had her feet pounded to a jelly by the drab-faced sub-lieutenants who came for their dances with terrible promptitude (Jack had stood by her to see all right). She had, for some wicked moments,

wished to dance on their feet also, in revenge; but dismissed the base thought, because they were in "Jack's regiment." So, after dolorously struggling to get as few kicks from them and bumps from others as possible, she was rewarded by each informing her, her step suited him better than that of any other girl he knew; and that each hoped to have several such turns with her at THEIR BALL.

At which Miss Dimity's heart sank like lead to her shoes: while the Smiler shrieked with unholy mirth, when she secretly confided this to him.

It was tempting, on this night of her first dance, to tell some one what she thought of it all. And it was disappointingly impossible to tell Jack. For though he came up with gruff punctuality between each dance to say, "Well, little one, how are you getting on?" yet Birdie Cox

seemed *always* on his arm, invariably adding, "Yes, dear little thing; how are you getting on?" Which became tiresome.

Also, Captain O'Donoghue had led her forth to dance, and, with all his languor, startled her by starting with his arm round her waist in such a vice-like grip that she soon felt each turn torture, and made agonised struggles for relief. But round went the "handsomest man in the Army," blandly smiling as he waltzed, whilst the worse his victim danced, the tighter and tighter he caught her, idiotically believing that this must mend matters.

When at last they stopped, Daisy felt squeezed to a votary of Juggernaut; her dainty shoulder-knots crushed, and her feelings lacerated. But her partner, caressing his moustache, only remarked,

"We didn't—aw—quite hit it off that time—eh? Never mind. A little more

practice, and you may get into my step.” (Into his horrible clutch, thought Daisy, trusting fervently not.) “I’m used—ah! —to trying all the new girls for our fellows.”

Daisy could have cried; and she was sure it was all his fault. She was ashamed to ask him not to hold her so tight in future; besides, plainly he thought his manner of grip and style of step must be considered a treat by the fortunate damsels he honoured. Feeling that with her it was, “Mene, mene, tekel upharsin,” and that the rest of Captain O’Donoghue’s “fellows” would be told she was weighed in the balance and found wanting, our heroine looked quite ruefully-minded when the Smiler again claimed her for about his sixth dance.

The room had grown hotter; the wind outside wilder; the coats waxier (like their owners, to speak schoolboy fashion). The

chalk had risen in impalpable clouds, paving all throats with a new proof that we live in the chalk age, geologically speaking.

Even the Smiler was fast losing the clearness of his laugh and the crispness of his moustaches.

Still his swing went on smoothly as ever in the dance. Still Daisy was charmed with him, as how indeed could she be otherwise? Then the little man was so gay, so flattering, so consoling.

“Don’t mind O’Donoghue; he’s so horribly conceited about his step. Now mine is *the* real *trois-temps*. But so many men will imagine their step is the only right one. Look at Hodge now—doing the Southsea Fling.”

In truth, that warrior now slowly and heavily circled passed them with Fuzzy Cox; his big hand, in a bigger, wrinkled

glove, being placed like a spread-eagle so high upon that young lady's back that it rested, in fact, on her shoulders.

Mr. Lee was so diverted by the appearance of this, that he cried, "Ho, ho, ho!" and twisted up his moustaches tight—till Daisy was afraid the couple in question would be incensed. As they stopped, he darted forward and whispered,

"Miss Cox—ho, ho! excuse my laughing, *won't* you?—but how do you like the way my friend Hodge places his hand?"

"It's awfully delicious," cordially responded that young lady, nodding back at him familiarly, and giving a retrospective delighted shiver at the recollection. "It feels so like a nice blister on my back!"

If the Smiler had laughed in his sleeve before, he now was fairly doubled up with delight, as he thought of retailing this little tale after mess; and he twisted up his

moustaches so much tighter than ever, that he seemed as if, in ecstatic agonies, he wanted to point the story with them.

The sudden opening of the long watched supper-room door recalled him to his senses; and he flew—carrying off Daisy—to be in at the feast, together with the rest of their already sworn band.

CHAPTER XVII.

“He’s but a coof for a’ that.”

BLANK disappointment!

On Mrs. Brandiston-Browne’s supper-table were arranged, with praiseworthy symmetry, a few dishes of sandwiches, and some glass jugs of suspicious-looking champagne-cup; nothing more.

Two or three of the hungry guests tried a sandwich, and gave a simultaneous ugh! These were fiendish secretions of potted red herring!

Nobody could finish theirs; and Mrs. Browne’s peacock screech could be heard coming nearer and nearer. With the

rapidity of despair Lee popped his under the table, an example followed by the other gentlemen; whilst Jack Dimity, and some others, devoured with thirst, tried the cup.

Sour cider, with apple slices bobbing therein by way of cucumber! The faces that now looked at each other outdid the bitterness of the cup; rivalled the salt sharpness of the potted herring.

“Is there nothing else but this poison?” sighed Jack Dimity. “By Jove——”

All the friendly leaguers’ eyes followed the direction of his, and spied a little, infinitesimal table behind the door.

On this a solitary decanter of sherry had been holding sway. But now it was in the grasp of Mr. Higginbotham, who held it tight in one hand, with the eager clutch of a discoverer; while, from the expression of his countenance, the wine-glass in his other hand had been well used several times al-

ready, and was intended still to be brimmed by this votary of Bacchus.

A murmur passed among the conspirators that this was Daisy's pet partner ! and the man whom Mrs. Browne had eulogized as a squire of high degree ; a country gentleman ; a young man of independent fortune.

"Such a treasure !" she had been overheard to whisper. "Such a blessing ! when there are only military men in Marstown, and they are generally not—well, not in affluent circumstances, you know."

The young men of the friendly league, red-coats all (except that they were now in mufti !) had received Mrs. Browne's overheard strictures on their financial position in some dudgeon, or with satirical glee.

Now, beholding her "treasure" in such a dubious position, they drew near to draw meek comparisons betwixt their rough

soldier selves and Mrs. Browne's Blessing, as they termed him.

Even Daisy, who was much more shy than the Cox girls, could not help heartily laughing, as their respective partners condoled with one another upon not being in such "affluent circumstances" as Mr. Higginbotham.

"Wears worsted stockings, you perceive," enviously remarked the light-spoken Smiler. "Only a rich man can afford to dress badly. That is a matter of common notoriety."

"Has absolutely a place of his own in the country; where, I should think, he has been brought up all his days, and would have done better never to leave it," was Jack's deeper-voiced comment.

"But the most *notorious* joke of all is the fellow's ball-tablets," ended Major Hodge, with a fat chuckle.

As if he had become aware of being observed, Mr. Higginbotham now looked round; upon which Daisy's face seemed to rouse some obscured memory in his dazed brain. Slowly he drew out the china-edged little slate (a very common one it was), mechanically breathed thereon, rubbed it with his coat-cuff by the mere force of habit—plainly.

For then, still eyeing Daisy and relinquishing his hold of the decanter, he slowly approached her.

Breathless silence fell upon the group of the friendly alliance. Basely hoping for some fun, they waited; whilst, with a more smothered utterance than ever, the young man (within two lives of the baronetcy) was understood to remind Miss Dimity that she had promised him a dance.

A tremor for poor Daisy ran through the coalition.

“Come away !” sepulchrally growled Jack, offering his arm.

But with amazing presence of mind, the little lady, standing her ground, calmly inquired of her would-be partner,

“Have you got it written down ?”

The unhappy young man had just rubbed it out—a fact of which he seemed unaware.

With a face of confusion he consulted the blank slate, and its now undecipherable blurs, then gazed at Daisy.

“As you do not seem to know what dance it was, we had better say no more about it. I am engaged for the rest of the evening,” said she, and sailed away with great dignity.

All followed her with suppressed applause ; except Mrs. Browne’s Blessing, who was still holding up his pocket-slate to the light with ever-increasing confusion of mind.

On subsequent occasions during the evening, Jack and the Smiler, who took deep interest in Mr. Higginbotham, returned. They reported him to the disgusted Daisy as having sought consolation in the fresh, single decanter of sherry that was next served out ; and as still mechanically breathing on his slate and wiping it.

On went the night. It was strange to Daisy, however, that, do as she would, she could never shake off the feeling that she was in second-rate society ; that she was almost sorry and ashamed for their yellow-visaged little hostess with her stinginess, poverty that made ridiculous pretences, and unfounded claims to gentility.

“How do you like it?” Major Hodge asked of her. And, as she hesitatingly replied that she had perhaps expected too much, was unused to dances, but loved

dancing, Jack and Mr. Lee, who stood by, both broke in,

“Remember, you are not coming out at this affair. Mind you tell everyone, you are only coming out at *our ball!*”

“It is a twopenny-halfpenny entertainment, certainly,” depreciatingly remarked the burly major. “But what better can you expect in a garrison town, Miss Dimity, eh? I own I take my fun out of this sort of society; because on principle I try to do so wherever one may be sent to. But confess now that you, who are used to a different sort of thing, have seen and heard some eye-openers since you came.”

But to him Daisy was not going to acknowledge anything of the sort. Was she likely to decry Marstown society and girls to a man who was paying so much attention to Fuzzy Cox; the kindest daughter of the people who had so good-naturedly

housed her for Jack's ball? Certainly not!

"Where is Miss Birdie to be found, I wonder? By the way, I've never given her a turn to-night. Daresay she's with your brother, though, very happy—what do you think?" went on the major, staring at Daisy with a peculiar smile.

"Really I have no idea. Perhaps, since Mrs. Luxton is her chaperon to-night, it would be better to ask her."

"Ah! capital; so it would," and, with a provoking desire to torment Miss Daisy Dimity—whose innocent trust in Jack and dignified respect for her companions, the Coxes, refused to be ruffled—Major Hodge turned quickly to Mrs. Luxton.

"Do I know where the youngest Miss Cox is? Indeed, I do not," replied that young woman, with laughing indignation, to his insinuating query. "Her chaperon?"

Yes; the girl asked me to let her come into the room behind me; it is a way these Marstown girls have. But, then, they never come near one afterwards during the whole evening, and would be very sorry if I were to go after them. . . All *they* want is the mere pretence of the thing!"

She stopped abruptly, as her interlocutor made a warning sign. Not having perceived Daisy close by till now, she did not know even then who she was, till Major Hodge whispered to her—she seemed much taken aback, and promised him a sound scolding by a look. For Jack was in the same regiment as her husband, and was, besides, a favourite of hers.

"You look quite surprised, Miss Dimity?" teasingly observed Major Hodge, on his return. "Was that an eye-opener? Come, you may as well own to it; do."

With more than even usual delight, his

mental victim hailed Jack, who at this moment made one of his frequent dives after her. No one could say she was not well guarded, at any rate; since it was one of the jokes of the evening to see how the young sister was carefully looked after by the brother, who was only two or three years older than herself.

“Well,” said young Cerberus, with an affectionate glance that to outsiders might falsely seem disparaging, “what do you want to bother me about now?”

“As if you thought it really a bother! Jack dear, Mr. Lee has been asking me to go out riding to-morrow, if you will come to take care of me. And—I should like it so much. He says Galloper Down is so delightful for a canter.”

“I daresay” (witheringly); “but what kind of animals do you both propose to canter? Two donkeys?”

“ Oh, Jack ! He says I can get a horse to hire, and he will get one for himself too. He knows of a beauty for me ! a mare, that goes like a lamb.”

“ He—he doesn’t know a horse from a cow. Well, don’t look so doleful, child. I must trust him to choose you a mount ; for, worse luck, all to-morrow morning I’m on duty. But I’ll come to take you, never fear.”

Then, turning away, he came back again ; asking, rather awkwardly,

“ By the way, though, Daisy, you are not going to dance this next with Lee, are you ? Oh, you *are*—— ! Because, you see, it’s not quite the thing—it doesn’t do—I mean, aren’t you dancing rather too often with him ?”

“ Oh ! Jack dear !” and Daisy’s face showed a dawning of great concern, but was changed after a moment’s reflection to one

of innocent triumph. "Why, no; you must be wrong. For I counted how many times *you* have danced with Birdie Cox, and it is two more dances still!"

Jack had not a word to say at that.

"I am all right, as long as I do only what you do, am I not?" continued his young sister, unconsciously pursuing her victory. "And, besides, Mr. Lee is teaching me how to dance; and he is your great friend, he says."

"Captain Gascoigne is my greatest friend," moodily murmured her brother. And he turned away, with some reluctance, to claim the youngest Miss Cox for the next dance, which she had already promised him.

When it was ended, Mrs. Cox came up rather hastily to Daisy.

"I am afraid I really *must* take you away now; you dissipated child. It is

dreadfully late, but I had not the heart to take you away when I saw" (flatteringly to the young man) "you were dancing with Mr. Lee."

Daisy broke out in honest regrets that Mrs. Cox should have stayed on her account.

"Oh, it does not signify, indeed—and certainly Mr. Lee is a very good *dancer*." (This was said in an aside tone, less flatteringly, as if the Smiler's other attributes were just a *leetle* less excellent.) "Well! I know you have been enjoying yourself, because I have never seen you all the evening!"

Since Mrs. Cox had herself rather tried to evade the unusual burden of "looking after" her charge, and had been daintily and busily winning sixpences at whist with three retired generals—this was hardly surprising.

But now, waiving excuses, she begged Lee to find her carriage; despatched him to bring her cloak; leant on his arm, taking it as a matter of course, as she hurried her little party outside.

And yet Major Hodge and Mr. Jones were there with her own daughters, but she did not impound their services. Daisy never remarked this. She only said,

“I wish I had seen Jack, to say good night to him.”

The little party in the brougham reached home rather sleepy, in spite of all the remarks they had to make. A very sleepy maid opened the door, and lit their candles.

“Where is Miss Birdie?” asked the weary mother,

“Not come home yet, ma’am.”

“Not come home! Why Mrs. Luxton left two dances ago. Is it possible she can have forgotten—? How extraordinary!”

“I heard Mrs. Luxton asking her ‘was she coming?’ and she answered ‘No,’” broke in Daisy. “She was dancing with Jack, my brother.”

“So like Birdie; careless, forgetful, inconsiderate,” murmured the anxious mother.

All faces gazed blankly at each other.

“We were almost the last. There was no one left, coming from this side of the town, but the officers. I declare, it serves her right,” uttered Pussy, who seemed in a sleepy, soured mood. But Fuzzy and Daisy both thought of consolation.

“Dear Mrs. Cox, it was not her fault, you may be sure. And Jack was with her; he always makes everything right.”

“Yes, don’t bother, mamma. Be grateful for all blessings, and it is a real blessing she was left with Dim—with Mr. Dimity.”

“Certainly there is no young man with whom I would as soon trust my girl,” said Mrs. Cox, impressively, transfixing Jack’s sister with her gaze.

As they all thus stood, huddled up in their wraps, shivering, anxious, the brougham gone, not a cab to be had, a rattle of wheels in the silent street aroused, then relieved them; and out jumped Miss Birdie from a hansom.

“What was the matter? Well, *I was left behind*, between you all!” she coolly replied, in answer to the outbursting flood of queries. “Mr. Dimity and I had gone upstairs to sit in the boudoir, after the last dance. (Give me another glass of wine, mamma.) Well, it grew very quiet in the house; nice and still. At last he got uneasy, and said the next dance ought to be beginning. So down we went, and what

do you think? . . . Everyone was gone but the fiddlers, and there were Mrs. and Miss Browne going round blowing out the candles. You should have seen their faces and Mr. Dimity's look—he! he! he!"

Daisy, for one, could imagine that Jack's look had been well worth the seeing; and that he would growl to himself like condensed thunder, at having been found in such a false position.

"But why did he not come back with you?" cried the sisters.

"He would not hear of it," replied Birdie, carelessly; but with secret chagrin. "Mrs. Browne is such a scandal-monger, perhaps it was just as well. He had to run half a mile to get me this cab, as it was. Then he put me in, paid the driver, and walked off alone to the barracks. So she can't say a word! Good night. I am

so sleepy." And carelessly yawning widely at the rest, Miss Birdie nevertheless remembered her manners so much as to honour their guest with a sudden hug and a gushing kiss on either cheek.

"It was very unfortunate, but still—" murmured Mrs. Cox, as if meditating aloud, and again softly transfixing Daisy with her impressive gaze—"But still, though there are very few other young men I could trust alone in such a position with one of my girls, I know that your brother is worthy of the highest confidence. There is no young man, as I said before, my dear, with whom I would allow one of my girls to go without a chaperon, as I would with him."

Really!

Even whilst murmuring due acknowledgment of her brother's praises, Daisy thought at once (she could not help it!) of

Major Hodge and Mr. Jones; and that if Jack were to dispense more with a chaperon than either of those two gentlemen did, when in the society of the Misses Cox, he might go very far indeed.

And why was it that such unlimited trust and such meaning confidence were to be reposed in Jack—why so?

In spite of making a very large allowance for the admiration and esteem that must of course be Jack's due—that naturally he would inspire all his acquaintances with—his adoring sister yet felt uneasy. Various trifles she had at the time thought insignificant, now recalled to memory, seemed important signs; straws showing how the wind blew. Yes, indeed; they were deeply important!

And thus, as Daisy laid her fresh cheek on the pillow after her first dance, it was

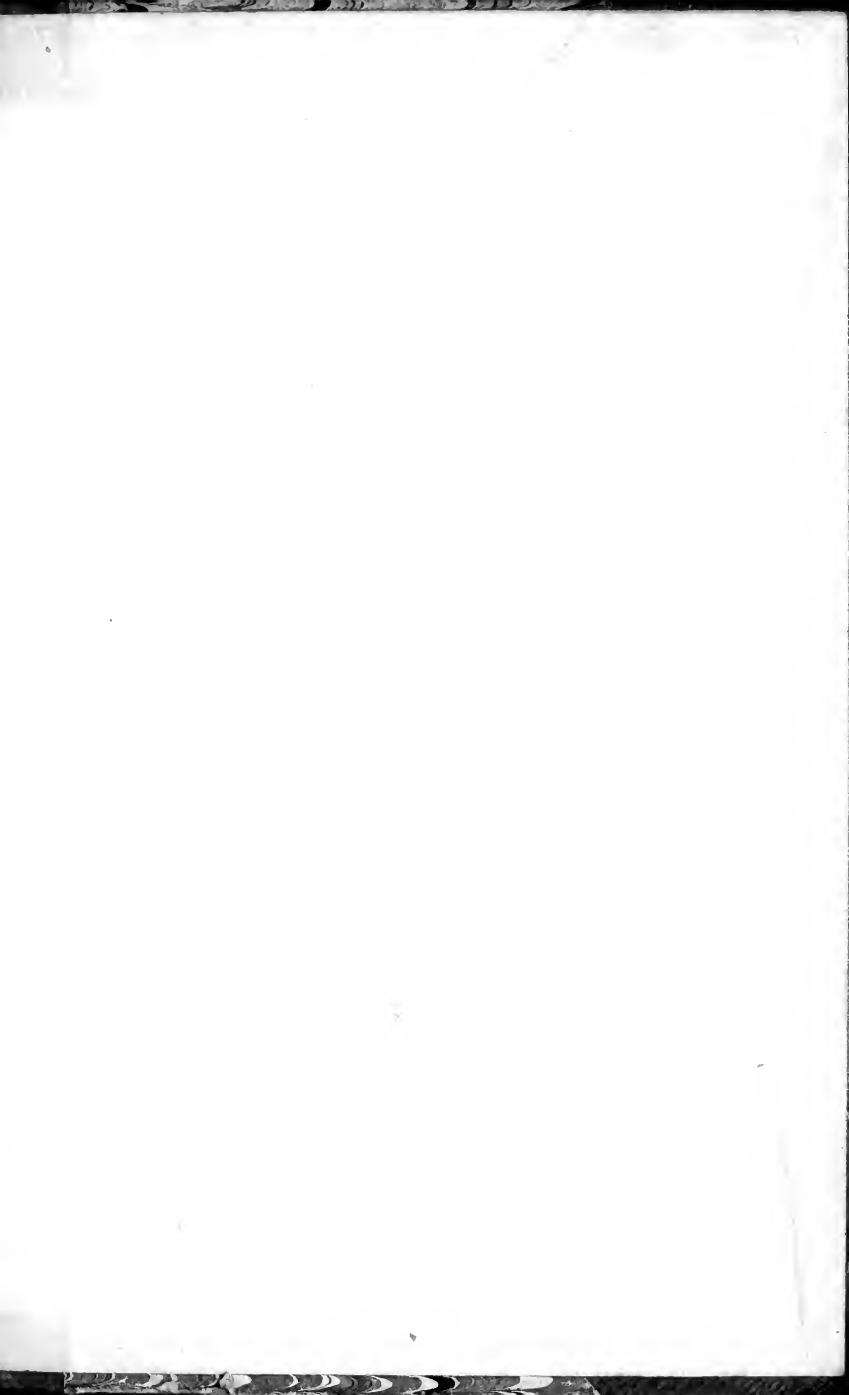
with quite a feeling of solemn shock banishing the memory of all the light twirlings and whirlings of the evening. For she seemed—quite by accident—to have stumbled upon a secret; to have had her eyes extraordinarily sharpened to discover the outline of a—well, not a plot (that was an ugly word), but a plan—no, not a plan either, but an *idea*! that might, if carried out, most seriously affect in future both the squire and their step-mother, Polly, herself, and dear old Elm Hall.

For fully ten minutes, that seemed an hour, Daisy lay awake—wondering with very sleepy but infinitely anxious alarms and wisdom, all incoherently mingled, whether this idea was an idea altogether of her own creation; whether, if carried out, it would be for her dearest Jack's HAPPINESS.

The sagest, next thought was whether—on the whole—it would not be better just then to go to sleep, and do the rest of her thinking by the light of the coming morning. Upon which she immediately acted.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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